The Young Fur Takers

St. George Rathborne

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The afternoon passing away warned him that he had better start upon preparation for the evening meal. [Page 79]

The Young Fur-Takers

OR

TRAPS AND TRAILS IN THE WILDERNESS

By

ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

Author of

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The Young Fur Takers;

or

Traps and Trails in the Wilderness

CHAPTER I.

OFF FOR A WINTER'S CAMPAIGN.

Caleb Cushing stood with a couple of wrinkles across his usually smooth forehead, and started at the strange collection of stuff he had just emptied out of an old chest.

It was piled up on the floor of the attic over his mother's little cottage in the New York village of Tedbury, nestled amid the far-away Adirondacks.

This was not the first time Caleb had emptied the chest and surveyed its odd contents, for it had lain there quite a few years, a relic of the widow's charitable instincts.

To her cottage had come an old man with a face bronzed by years of exposure to the elements, but now marked by the shadow of sickness; he had claimed to be a brother of her mother, and having learned by accident of her

location, turned to her little domicile as the last link connecting him with the past.

Abner Hollister had remained with Caleb and his mother for a year, and then they buried him in the little churchyard.

What he had he left to the widow, and it was enough to pay the mortgage on her home, leaving a bit for emergencies; but what interested the lad most of all was this chest in the garret, and he had spent many an hour poring over the contents, especially interested in the copious notes taken by an old trapper, and woods naturalist, who had passed the better part of his life among the pines and hemlocks and birches of the Northern forests.

There were some scores of traps, all showing rusty signs of much use, but kept oiled and pliable—there were musty blankets, cooking utensils, a gun that had doubtless supplied the owner with game for several decades, and was still dependable, a broad-bladed hunting knife, a ditty-bag containing various little things likely to come in useful to a man marooned in the woods over winter—these and still other things Caleb had pawed over many a time, his soul yearning for some of the experience they stood for.

Caleb loved the open with an affection that he inherited from his father, who, in his day,

had been very fond of periodical trips into the heart of the Adirondacks in search of health and recreation.

The boy had hunted with fair success, and spent much of his leisure time in the summer chasing the elusive trout in the various streams around Tedbury; but each year his desire to get away and see the life that Uncle Abner had lived was growing stronger within him.

He had never fully broached the subject to his mother, because he felt that he had no reasonable excuse for leaving her with the old couple who worked the farm, while he was living at his ease in the wilderness; but of late a chance had come whereby he might kill two birds with one stone, and his mother had given her consent, though with secret misgivings.

Caleb had met a young fellow who was spending the summer in Tedbury, and taking occasional trips around with a couple of guides, for he seemed to have an unlimited supply of money.

Anson Garraway had been sent to the mountains for his health.

He had not really shown signs of pulmonary troubles, but as his father had succumbed to consumption, and the boy's physique did not seem to be overly strong, the family doctor had advised that he put in a year if possible up

among the high altitudes, drinking in the piney woods ozone, and living much in the open. The summer had done him an incalculable amount of good, and Caleb and he had become quite chummy; for Anson turned out to be an amiable fellow, with traits of character that quite appealed to the widow's son, fond of study himself.

Of course they had exchanged confidences while on some of their little expeditions, and Caleb learned how the other aspired to become a surgeon at some future day, if he grew robust and strong; on the other hand he explained that his ambition lay in the line of an education, and that if he could only get a few hundred dollars together he meant to go to college the next year.

Anson had immediately offered to loan him all he needed; but he found that he was dealing with a very proud and independent lad; for Caleb, while thanking him with tears in his eyes, declared he would never be indebted to another for such a thing as an education—that he must earn the money some way or stay home.

From one thing to another they wandered in their confidential talks, until finally Anson broached a scheme that took with his chum like wildfire.

It was nothing more or less than that they make arrangements to spend the coming fall and winter in the woods, trapping and living the life of hermits, until spring came.

Anson would supply all the things needed, and Caleb on his part could have what money was received for the furs taken during their sojourn in the wilderness.

At first the latter had demurred; but his friend had put so specious a case before him, telling how he would otherwise have to employ a guide, and lose much of the real enjoyment of genial company, that finally Caleb had consented to the arrangement.

And now as he sat there cross-legged on the floor of the garret, with the traps of the old man lying before him, thoughts of Abner's lonely life in the woods also obtruded themselves, and he found himself wishing the experienced trapper had lived to accompany them on their trip.

Upon examining the said traps he found that they were not antiquated by any means, but the genuine Newhouse kind, tested and tried; one of the first things Anson had done when the matter of their going had been settled beyond all peradventure, was to order four dozen more of the same kind, even one large

one for bear, though there was but a slim possibility of their ever having any use for it.

These were now at the station, and Anson would be along presently with the big bunch of supplies that he had had sent up from New York.

They had studied the charts, and pored over the diaries of Uncle Abner, seeking to settle upon a spot for their winter's campaign that would be satisfactory from every standpoint—fairly easy to reach, and abounding in game when gained.

It had been finally determined to try the last place old Abner had had his winter quarters in; and hence their plans were made looking to a haul of the duffle across country to Black Loon Lake, where two canoes would be awaiting them, into which supplies and boys would pile, and the long trip up the river begun.

After three days' bucking against the current they expected to come to a creek fully described in the diary, though the mouth was so concealed by undergrowth that a casual pilgrim would never notice it in passing.

Into this they were to turn, and paddle up the same for another day, when it would be time to go ashore, for their long cruise might be looked upon as done.

A shout outside announced that Anson had

arrived with the stuff, having hired old Bill Jack's rig to haul it to the cottage.

Then there was a busy time indeed.

Everything was piled in Caleb's room and the packing began.

When a fellow has plenty of money there are innumerable wrinkles in the line of camping goods that he can secure, all calculated to add to the comfort of the outing, provided it is possible to transport the same with ease.

If one happens to be going over a route where several long portages are necessary, it is advisable to go in as light as possible; but when there are no such burdensome trials awaiting the would-be campers, it is folly to deny one's self the pleasures that come from a portable stove for rainy weather, plenty of warm blankets, or even a sleeping-bag such as Anson purchased for himself, together with other things along the same line.

The clothes were packed away in waterproof bags, and the provisions in handy bunches, easy to tote in case such a thing became necessary; for as the notes of the old veteran said there might be times when the creek would be low, and then to reach the best portion of his favorite resort it was a case of portage.

Both Anson's guns, a new Marlin repeating

rifle and a double-barrel shotgun, were in canvas cases, but Caleb gave his old rifle no such protection; it had weathered the storms of many years with but an occasional dose of oil.

All was ready by evening, and Caleb's mother tried to assume a satisfied look, though she knew she should miss her only boy very much as the long winter months crept by; still, he must be going out into the world soon, seeking his fortune, so she could not stand in his light, since his mind seemed bent upon college.

"Looks like enough for a small army," laughed Anson, as they stood and surveyed the bunches of traps, supplies and bags of clothing and blankets.

"Yes, but when two healthy boys get to work eating they'll soon diminish; and unless you find considerable game to help out, your larder will be apt to look pretty slim before spring," observed a neighbor, who, having boys of his own, knew what they were capable of in the line of the food question.

"The only thing that puzzles me is how we're ever going to get all this stuff into a couple of canoes," said Caleb, shaking his head dubiously.

"Don't worry about that. There's a knack of packing that guides have down to a science,

and I've been studying it all summer. Wait and see the result of my observations, old fellow. Room to spare, you'll find. We'll need it, too, with virtually four days' paddling before us. and up-stream at that," declared Anson.

So they went on chaffing and joking, for Caleb's heart reproached him somewhat at leaving his mother for so long a time, and only for the fact that he had in view the project of making enough money with which to start in college he would have been tempted to give the trip up.

There was not much sleep in the cottage that night; for Anson had remained over so as to be on hand early in the morning, for they expected to start soon after breakfast in the big buckboard wagon, bound for distant Black Loon Lake.

As the October sun peeped above the horizon they were eating breakfast, and shortly after the wagon arrived, drawn by a pair of rough looking horses, but which could do good work over the steep roads of the mountains.

It took fully an hour to get things decently packed, there were so many bundles to be secured, so that nothing might be lost in the rough journey.

Then farewells were said, and they drove off.

Caleb turned before the bend was reached and looked back.

His mother stood by the well-remembered white gate waving her handkerchief, and if her eyes were filled with the tears she had previously kept back for his sake up to that moment, he was too far away to know it.

He stood up and waved his hat and blew kisses back until the bend shut out the sight; then for half an hour he sat there without a word; for it was really the first time Caleb had ever been separated any length of time from his mother, and every boy knows how it pulls upon the heart strings to break away from the blessed home ties.

Anson paid no attention to his chum, purposely talking with the driver of the buckboard, feeling that presently Caleb would recover some of his customary cheerfulness; he had gone through the same experience himself, and knew what it meant.

And he judged wisely, for after a time Caleb began to take an interest in their surroundings, and long before noon he was feeling quite himself.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAMP.

"That must be the place, Anse."

It was three days later, and the two boys, seated in a couple of canvas canoes that were well packed with all manner of bundles, had ceased paddling upstream, and were surveying a section of the left-hand shore where the undergrowth seemed wildly luxuriant.

"It is for a fact; I can see the water of the creek joining that of the river, for it is darker, as if it comes from tamarack swamps somewhere back yonder; but a fellow would never notice it unless he chanced to be looking for something of the sort, as we are. Just as old Abner said in his diary, there's the three scrub-oaks marking the spot. Yes, we've arrived at another camp ground, and here we'll spend the third night. By another we can hope to be at the place we're aiming to reach, and thinking of getting settled for the season."

"It looks good, anyway," replied Caleb, surveying their wild surroundings with an air of satisfaction.

They pushed into the smaller stream, and paddled up it half a mile, when, noting a fine

place for a camp the canoes were shoved ashore.

While on the river they had met with numerous parties going to and from the hunting camps, and not a few times did they hear the report of rifles among the uplifts near by, proving that the season was on for deer.

One thing Caleb felt glad about, and this was the fact that no yelping of a pack of dogs came to them, for the cruel sport of hounding had been wiped out in the glorious Adirondacks by statute.

It was great sport cooking their supper over the fire, and these two lads had the spirit of the woods in their hearts to the full, for they enjoyed everything appertaining to the game; even the discomforts were made light of, and jokes ruled the hour with them.

Thus far the weather had been favorable, with clear days and frosty nights.

Later on would come Indian summer, and perhaps a spell of rainy weather before winter set in for good; but they were prepared for it, and could meet difficulties with that philosophical spirit all true woodsmen cultivate.

They had their first game supper on this night.

Caleb, wandering afield during the hour they had spent ashore at noon, had found a bunch

of partridges, and managed to bag a couple of fat birds with his chum's pet Marlin double-barrel, which he liked to handle—he himself carried the rifle which had once been his father's and which in its time had doubtless knocked over many a plump deer in this same wilderness.

Never did anything appeal more to the appetites of those two hungry boys than that game supper, with the woods for a background, and the purling creek fretting and complaining at their feet, as if protesting against the prospect of its early suppression at the hand of Jack Frost.

Fortunately enough there had been considerable rain early that fall so there was no necessity for making a portage up the little stream, as the chronicles of old Abner had hinted as a possibility.

At this time of the year there is never a sign of black fly or mosquito in the North woods, and the air is simply perfection.

Anson was delighted with everything, and predicted that they were bound to have a very pleasant, as well as profitable, sojourn of it.

Of course they would feel easier after they had located, and had a roof over their heads to protect them from the weather; but there was ample time for all that sort of thing, and

boys as a rule are not given very much to worrying over things that may never happen; so they made merry, and enjoyed every minute of the time spent in Camp No-care.

In the morning the same weather conditions prevailed, and after a hasty breakfast they finished packing the canoes, it was hoped for the last time on that trip, and once more resumed the monotonous jog upstream.

The creek, of course, grew gradually more and more narrow, but it seemed to hold its own in regard to depth in a wonderful manner, such as neither of the lads had ever seen in connection with an Adirondack "feeder."

At noon they began to take particular note of their surroundings, feeling that they were now in the vicinity of old Abner's hang-out, and that they could not afford to miss the blazes on the trees his diary mentioned.

During the morning they had surprised quite a number of wild animals along the creek, among them being several mink, a badger, a couple of coons, some muskrats, and an animal of which they had a very fleeting look, but which Caleb declared must be an otter.

This looked promising.

Would it not be fine if no one had camped in this section, so far away from the river and civilization, since that last winter when old Ab-

ner had trapped here, now many years back?

During that period the little woods folks must have increased enormously, and become quite unsuspicious of what a trap meant; so that the prospect for the winter looked excellent.

These things helped to make them lighthearted, and they could hardly keep from giving expression to their feelings in shouts; only that they knew full well no trapper ever indulges himself in that boisterous manner, unless he wishes to drive all the game away; for these timid creatures easily take alarm, especially when a human voice rings through the forest aisles.

Silence is the watchword of the successful trapper, coupled with observation and cunning, for his wits are matched against those of the animals he aims to catch, and nature has made them keen and suspicious.

No stop was made at noon, seeing that they believed themselves to be so near the termination of their journey, and the eagerness that urged them on would not hear of further delay; so they continued to paddle quietly and watch for signs.

It was about an hour later that Anson gave a grunt of satisfaction, and raising his paddle pointed ashore.

"Notice that hemlock with the bent trunk—what's that on the near side—looks to me mighty like a blaze," he ejaculated.

"That's just what it is, and no mistake, old chap. I guess we've arrived," said the other, laughing at the thought; for this eternal paddling was beginning to wear upon their muscles.

They hastened to land and examine the mark at closer range, when it was seen beyond any question or doubt that a hatchet had once sliced a bit of bark away, making what is known as a "blaze," and evidently intended to mark the spot above all others.

The boys had frequently followed such a line of "scars" through the dim woods, when going to and fro on their hunting or fishing excursions; but they had never been one-half so pleased to see a "blaze" as just now, when it signified rest and comfort, as well as business at the old stand of Abner Hollister.

The canoes were unloaded and then pulled altogether out of the water.

Too excited to start a fire and do any cooking the twain devoured a cold lunch and then went prospecting.

Already they had a pretty fair idea of the lay of the land from the description given in those precious notebooks; and as they prowled

around it was to frequently exclaim, as they recognized some particular bunch of trees or a jutting rock, mentioned by Abner as "neighbors" of his lone camp in the wilderness.

And finally Caleb gave a cry.

"Look! there's a cabin of some sort yonder among those pines—almost overgrown with undergrowth in the years that have passed, but surely the one he mentions. Come on, let's see how much repairing it needs," he said, eagerly.

They advanced and almost reverently stepped through after opening the door, which was fastened with only a bar, as is customary in the mountains, where they think every man is honest, and genuine tramps are unknown.

The roof was partly gone, and a squirrel ran out of the hole, having evidently considered the cabin a splendid home for his store of nuts.

"Not half bad," declared Anson, with a nod of his head; "why, we can fix this old roost up in a couple of days so that it will hold water fine, and do us the whole winter. Don't you think so, Cale?"

"Of course. When we get through we'll be as snug as two bugs in a rug. It was clever for you to think of the tools and nails. And what pleases me most of all is the fact that we're going to settle right in Uncle Abner's

quarters, where the associations must often bring to mind his seamed and brown face, always good-natured and kind. He had some sort of disappointment as a young man, a girl jilted him, mother says, but while it drove him away from mankind it didn't sour his disposition one whit. How I wish he was here!"

"Perhaps we'll feel the inspiration of his spirit with us, as we trap along his favorite old runways, and cook our meals at the same hearth he used. And to think that we have his Newhouse outfit along, too. Well, I'm mighty glad we've arrived, for my muscles are sore with that constant grind with the spruce blade."

They had a tent that would answer their purpose for a few days, until such time as they could repair the hut.

So camp was made.

The cabin was close to the creek after all, though they had wandered around considerably before finding it, such was the clever manner in which the original builder had hidden the result of his handiwork from casual eyes along the creek.

The stores were secured where prowling animals could not find them, and while day lasted the two lads worked at the roof of the cabin,

so that by night they had made it permanently secure.

A fire being kindled on the hearth that had lain idle all these years it was found to draw excellently; and things began to look quite cheerful around them.

"Another night and we may move in here and take up our quarters," declared Anson, as they stood before the fire, and watched the flames shoot up the chimney.

"That's going some, I guess. We figured on three days, you know. But I'm anxious to get some traps out and see what luck we're going to have. I anticipate a busy winter," said Caleb, whose enthusiasm had never waned, even when the task of bucking against the current of the river seemed irksome and monotonous.

Both boys were possessed of considerable stamina and determination; what they started to do they would certainly carry to a finish, unless some extraordinary difficulties arose, against which they were absolutely powerless.

A stubborn man will keep on when he knows it is useless, a determined one is just as persistent up to a certain point, when discretion tells him it is wise to admit temporary defeat, and come up fresh for another effort later on.

That night would long remain a pleasing memory with the two youngsters.

It was their first at the old stamping grounds of Uncle Abner, and as the fire under the hemlocks lighted up the surrounding scene they talked of the many things the veteran trapper had mentioned in his books.

And when finally they lay down to sleep under the shelter of the waterproof tent little timid woods folks crept out from the undergrowth and prowled around the camp, looking to see what these strangers had brought up into their domain; and through the spreading branches of the towering pine the night wind sighed and whispered, as if telling the secrets of the great, lone land.

So the night passed and all was well.

CHAPTER III.

BAGS THE FIRST FUR.

With the dawn the boys were astir, for they expected it to be a busy day.

Ere long the sound of the hammer was heard, startling the neighboring denizens of the thickets; but it was a necessity that could not be avoided, since they just had to get the cabin in decent shape before thinking of moving in.

Besides, their trapping would be done at some little distance away from home, so they were not likely to disturb those animals whose furry coats meant a siege of college life for an ambitious lad.

At noon much progress had been made, and the boys thought they were entitled to a bit of exploration, just to see how the land lay along the upper reaches of the creek, where old Abner had done the major portion of his trapping, most of his game being such animals as take to water, such as mink, otter and muskrats.

The last named they would find by the hundreds in the big tamarack swamp that lay about half a mile away, according to the rude chart of the vicinity left by the former inhabi-

tant; and in Abner's time a beaver colony had also held out in that vicinity, though the boys hardly anticipated finding such game now, for it is seldom one of the species is ever heard of in the Adirondacks, though fairly plentiful in some parts of Maine, out of the beaten paths of hunters and loggers.

They had studied the whole business of trapping thoroughly, and believed they knew just where the secret of success lay.

Anson had corresponded with a big fur house in St. Louis, and secured some little tin packets of various animal baits, as well as the "scent" that was to be used on their moccasins when walking to and from the traps, so that the man-odor would be destroyed, and the game deceived into thinking one of his kind had recently gone along that way.

Besides, in the notebooks left by Uncle Abner there were full directions for catching every known species of game found in New York State; so that they could hardly go amiss.

They saw plenty of signs during their short walk to convince them that there was every prospect of a bountiful season ahead.

Caleb could hardly contain himself, but would have liked to start right in at doing something; but Anson held him in restraint.

Each of the boys had weak and strong

points, and that was how they pulled together so well, for where one found himself wanting the other proved particularly strong.

"Tomorrow we'll start in and make the holes along the bank, just as Uncle Abner used to do. Perhaps we'll even find some of the ones he made long ago. Now we must return to our mutton, which means the cabin door, and the bunks and table and seats. That is job enough to last until dark, I take it. Everything in good time, Cale. We've got some months ahead of us, and the fellow who knows how to win a race never puts on a full head of steam in the start. Come on, partner."

They did put in good licks that afternoon, and when darkness fell the cabin was completely finished, in-so-far as to make it habitable. Of course, as time passed they would find occasion to add little things in order to make it more comfortable, but that could wait.

Their packages were undone that evening after supper, and distributed in the various places designed for their accommodation, the garments hung along the walls, while the provisions that could be injured, sugar, coffee, tea, flour, salt, bacon, salt pork, hard tack, rice, onions, potatoes, and all such being stored away in a rough but serviceable closet which had been fashioned from some slabs Abner

must have carried to this place with infinite labor.

Young Garraway had become addicted to the weed, but while Caleb had never cared to smoke, and often jokingly took his chum to task on account of his habit, it was not at all offensive to him; and Anson did seem to extract such solid comfort from his old pipe; so that there was not likely to arise any dissension on that account.

"I've got my own vices, even if smoking or drinking do not figure among them. For instance, I've a beastly temper, once I'm aroused, and can act as ugly as sin," Caleb said, when his friend was apologizing for his weakness, after supper.

"Don't believe it. You're stringing me. Ever since I've known you I never once saw you get real mad," Anson quickly declared.

"Well, you don't want to, and that's a fact. My dad had the same trouble, he once told me when I broke out in his presence, and it got him into serious difficulty, for he beat a man terribly, being blinded by fury. If witnesses hadn't proven that father was justified he'd have been put in jail, he said. Anyway, it gave him a scare that he never forgot, and he learned to control his vicious temper after that. I don't know whether I could, for sev-

eral times when particularly mad things seemed to get dark before my eyes, and I hardly knew what I was doing."

"Well, it's awfully nice of you to put up with this failing of mine. Don't know how I'd get on without the solace of a pipe. Guess I'm cut out for a regular old bach. Hello! where to now?" as Caleb arose, picked up his rifle and stepped to the door.

"Just thought I'd take a stretch outside and see what the weather looks like. We've been so busy in here for some hours we don't know whether it's going to rain tomorrow or not. Hope it won't, for I'm determined to make a start in that mink-holing business along the bank of the creek. I'm taking the gun for company, and not with the expectation of bagging any game," laughed the other.

"Don't despise an opportunity if one comes along, or a fat 'possum either. Once I tasted the bird down in Kentucky, where the coons had roasted it to a delicious brown, and I tell you it made a hit with me. But they're rather scarce up here, I understand, and not to be compared with the Southern ones. Good luck, anyhow."

Caleb went outdoors.

It was the tenth of October, and the moon was somewhat more than half full, so that as

her bright beams filtered down through the foliage of hemlock and pine they dispelled the darkness to some extent, though the covering overhead was rather dense.

Caleb sauntered down to the creek.

Here their canoes were snugly secreted amid the bushes, turned upside down so as to be protected against the coming snows of winter; if so be they found need of a boat before the ice came, which was very possible, it would be easy to put one in the water, for such was the lightness of the canvas craft that either of the boys could handle one at a time.

Standing there at the spot where Uncle Abner had undoubtedly landed scores of times when he was monarch of all he surveyed in this wilderness, Caleb allowed his mind to cover many matters that were of interest to him.

From this half reverie he was aroused by hearing a rustling sound along the bank, as if some wandering animal drew near.

Caleb, remembering the injunction of his comrade, waited to ascertain, if he could, what sort of a visitor he was about to have before making a move toward scaring it away; and thinking how strange it would be if on the very first occasion he should find a chance to

satisfy that longing on the part of Anson for another dose of roast 'possum.

Presently he discovered the moving animal, and while the light was too weak for him to make absolutely certain he believed that it was certainly something very much along that order.

At any rate it behooved him to try and carry out his intentions; and with a smile at the probable surprise and delight of Anson when he learned how good the gods had been to him, Caleb drew a bead on his victim and touched the trigger.

There was a sharp report, for the rifle was a long-barreled one, and could be said to possess the famous "whip-like" sound that has ever been a part of stories concerning old pioneer days along the Ohio, when they used muzzle-loaders, with flint locks, and tremendous barrels.

Caleb sprang forward, for he saw that his quarry was struggling upon the soil, and with a blow from a stick, hastily snatched up, he finished its existence.

"Hello! what's all this mean? Want any help—have you run up against bar?" called Anson from the doorway of the cabin, where he could be seen standing, holding his double-barrel Marlin.

Caleb stalked forward, and pushed his way into the cabin.

"I've done my part—see to it that it's browned to the king's taste," he said, carelessly holding up the object he had knocked over.

One look Anson took at the gray body and rat-like tail.

" 'Possum, as sure as you live! Bless my soul, how did you do it, old fellow? Are you a wizard, and do I only have to express a wish for anything when you coolly step outside and drag it in? Whoop! won't we fare high tomorrow, though? Everything's just coming our way, it seems. This is living, that's what!"

"Poor little critter, he heard we had arrived, and came to pay his respects; only to have a chunk of lead pass through his ribs. Is the skin spoiled, Ans?"

At this the other burst out laughing.

"Just listen to the mercenary fellow; when I tell him we're in for a royal feast all he thinks of is a measly skin, worth, let's see, Funston says from fifteen cents up to eighty-five for the finest. We'll call this a medium, and let it go at forty, after all the necessary things are done, such as stretching, drying, toting to market, etc. Well, it's a beginning,

anyhow, and would buy you a light lunch the first day you were in college, eh, Cale?"

But Caleb was serious, and knew that much depended upon his accomplishing the big task he had set out to perform; he must not despise small beginnings, for his winter's catch would undoubtedly be made up of many such, forming an aggregate that might be worth while.

So he spent the balance of the evening taking off the skin, according to what he knew of the business, and assisted by the copious notes made by Uncle Abner as to his particular methods of doing this, so as to get the highest market value for his season's catch.

When he had skinned the 'possum he fastened the fur to the thin board, pelt side out, as that was the proper method of curing the particular species.

Others that are cured in the same way are skunks, otter, and muskrat; while marten, wolf, fisher, lynx, beaver, foxes of all kinds, raccoon, and ermine or white weasel, must be cured fur side out.

Great care must be taken to dry these furs in a shady place, and not near the fire, else they will shrink too fast and be spoiled.

When Caleb, who had in times past had some experience along these lines, though limited in extent, held up his first trophy of the season,

his chum clapped his hands and ceased writing in his diary to say:

"Great stunt, old man. I see you're going to make things hum after a bit, when you get that string of traps out. Won't we be a busy bunch, you with your trapping, and me trying to bag enough game to keep us from going hungry, and making soup out of our old moccasins. Well, d'ye know it's nearly eleven, and I'm getting awful sleepy, so here's to try the new bunks. Last up put out the glim!"

Caleb was willing to follow suit; and thus ended their second day at the new camp, which was to be their home for the winter months.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MIGHTY NIMROD.

On the following day the two lads each started to enjoy himself according to his particular bent.

Anson took his Marlin, with some buckshot shells in his pocket for an emergency, and sauntered out to look for game, hoping to at least bag a few partridges along the ridges, and it might be get a chance at a deer.

As for Caleb, he had work of a different character to keep him busy during the entire day; but he anticipated great enjoyment in carrying out his designs, for it was a step toward the grand object he had in view, and which must monopolize his attention from now on.

He carried his rifle because prudence dictated such a course, but hardly expected to have any use for it that day.

His course was up the creek, and when he had reached a certain point, mention of which was made in Uncle Abner's notes, he stopped to dig a hole in the bank just a little above the water—a hole that was some eight or nine inches across, and a couple of feet deep.

When this was completed he threw some

driftwood about it, splashed water over his tracks and removed the scent of his presence; then going on about twenty or more yards he repeated the performance.

So he kept industriously at work all morning, making homes for his little friends, the mink; just as the crafty spider burnishes up his silken web, and then sings to the unsuspicious fly to "Step into my parlor, please," but alas, once the poor insect accepts the kind invitation he wishes he hadn't.

In all Caleb must have made nearly half a hundred holes of this character before quitting.

They were to be left alone for a week or ten days, until the mink had gotten quite used to them, and were trading from one to another of these cute little homes which some kindly biped had gone to the trouble to fashion for their particular use; then he would come along in his canoe, set a trap in each of those that showed signs of being favorites, and the game would be on.

This is supposed to be the greatest device for catching mink ever invented, and one clever trapper accumulated nearly four hundred pelts in a single season by such methods.

When Caleb got back to the cabin the day was well spent, and he was dog-tired from his

severe labors; but the task was now done, and he would not be likely to have another similar one during the whole winter.

Anson had arrived before him, and was busily engaged superintending the cooking of the 'possum.

The little portable stove seemed to work to a charm, for he had made a fire in it, as he desired to use the oven.

A hole had been made in the wall of the cabin for the pipe to stick out, and judging from the roaring sound they could not find any fault with the draught.

The oven was soon very hot, and into it Anson popped the "bird," which he had fixed with some sweet potatoes, in true Southern style; for 'possum without this familiar accompaniment, yams, is only half-fare to a Georgia darky.

Then later he tried his hand at some biscuits, utilizing the oven while they had it hot; but these could not be baked until the meat had been removed, for there was a lack of space in the little sheet-iron receptacle.

Caleb, hungry after his long tramp and hard work, did confess without hesitation that the odor arising from the beautifully browned 'possum was tantalizingly delicious, and he hardly knew how he was going to hold out

until the bread could have its turn; but Ans set him to work brewing the tea and getting other things in readiness, being the chief cook for this first week.

That was the way they had settled upon as the fairest—each member of the combination to have a full week at the job of cooking; and in this way it would not be apt to grow irksome, and promised a variety, as they must naturally vie with each other in the endeavor to excel in new dishes.

At last the "boss" declared that everything was ready, and that if Caleb would get out the napkins they would fall to; of course this was a joke, for so far as they knew such a thing as a napkin could not be found within twenty miles of Camp Whispering Pine.

But it sounded good to Anson, and he was fond of chaffing anyhow.

'Possum—well, if one could judge from the rapidity with which that juicy morsel vanished, you would set it down as assured that it was a great success, and fully equal to all it has ever been cracked up to be in the South; but as Caleb declared, it should be eaten amid congenial surroundings to get the full flavor of the delicacy; and the same dish, partaken of at a banquet, would not seem one-half so fine.

And to the delight of both boys the biscuits

turned out to be "just dandy," as the proud cook unblushingly declared, as he demolished his sixth one, and mentally counted the balance to see that Caleb would get his share.

The oven was voted a huge success, and their only concern now seemed to be as to how long the stock of flour would hold out with such appetites, and the chance to make such appealing biscuits.

"We should have lugged a barrel in," declared Anson, sadly, as he contemplated what an inroad he had already made in the big bag.

At this, of course, Caleb laughed and declared that they must curb their appetites for hot biscuits, being content with other fare.

"We hope to get some venison after a bit, and perhaps a bear steak. Now, that wouldn't go bad, for a change," he said, casually.

"By George!" exclaimed Anson, jumping up, with a grin on his face; "I quite forgot something. And you never took a look into our larder. Say, how does that happen to strike you?" and throwing aside some sheltering cloth he disclosed to the wondering gaze of his chum a great bundle that seemed to be made up of a deerskin, and containing fresh meat.

Then it was Caleb's turn to gasp and turn a look of mute delight upon the mighty hunter,

who immediately thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his vest, puffed out his chest, and assumed airs.

"Oh, I'm the great Nimrod, all right. You can knock over such lowly critters as 'possum and coons (begging the pardon of the former, for he's a royal bird when cooked by a chef), but when it comes to big things like a two-year-old buck, you must hand the palm to your Uncle Anson," he observed.

"How did you get him—with a load of bird-shot—and is all this meat venison for our roasts and steaks? Partner, I congratulate you, and also myself on the glorious possibilities before us. Now tell me, for if I'm not from Missouri I want to know," cried Caleb, forcing the other down into his seat again, so that he could not escape without a confession.

"That's easy, my boy. I just had a hunch there might be a deer around the border of the swamp, where I arrived about an hour before noon, and something caused me to change my shells to the ones containing buck-shot. Say, talk about a premonition, that was it for keeps; because it wasn't five minutes later when up he popped out of the lush grass —ain't that what they all say?—and I gave him both barrels as he jumped over a log. Bless the little darling, she didn't fail me, and she

never has when I did my part of the game; for over went Mr. Buck in a heap, and there was little Anson with more than he could tote to camp.

"I exercised my hunter's skill, and cut the deer up in a saddle and other portions too numerous to mention. The head with the antlers is hanging from a tree, and I'll bring it in tomorrow, for he had a splendid pair of horns. And, by the way, Caleb, you'll do well to put in a few days around that same swamp, for it's fairly alive with muskrats. They've got little mounds here and there in scores of places, and I guess you can catch your fill of the varmints."

In this matter-of-fact way did Anson dispose of his story; but the other could picture the scene in his own mind, and he knew that his chum was prouder of his first deer than he cared to admit.

"We ought to be very thankful for the generous supply of fresh meat. The more we can get before winter sets in for good the better; because it would be tough if our supplies failed us before spring," Caleb remarked.

"Oh! I'm not worrying much. At the worst we have muskrat in plenty, and I've been told that it's a dainty dish if properly cooked. They never give it that name though, but

always the Indian one of musquash. After a while I'm going to try my hand on one in that dandy little oven, and if it turns out half as good as the 'possum did there'll be no kick coming from this side of the house. You hear me?"

"I saw plenty of deer signs myself up the creek, and kept on the watch, but it was not my fate to have a peep at buck or doe. Still, my duty is in another line, and you're booked for the big hunter act. Now I'll tell you what I did during my tour up the stream three miles or more."

Anson was deeply interested, for while he cared more for hunting than trapping, he could understand how his chum had a peculiar interest in the success or failure of the expedition, since it meant so much for his future plans.

"Well, that thing has to lie for a time now, and meanwhile I'm curious to see what you'll do among those swamp fellows. You can understand that with the job of cutting the deer up and carrying the stuff away over here I didn't have very much time to look around; but I was curious about some trees I saw cut down at the foot of the swamp, and a regular dam built there—done recently, too."

Caleb looked uneasy, yes, unhappy.

"Then we're going to have near neighbors. I'm sorry for that, because I was just congratulating myself on our being alone here in this wilderness all winter. It's too bad, that's what," he said.

"Oh! I don't know that these chaps will give us much cause for worry. I'm dead sure they'll not interfere with any of our arrangements if we let them alone, for from what I've always heard they're the most peaceful neighbors in the world, retiring in their habits, and quite gnawing little fellows."

"Beaver!" exclaimed Caleb, as a light broke in upon him; "do you really mean it, Ans? Are there any of the broadtails near us?"

"I didn't actually see any, but the signs are plentiful. I guess I made too much noise moving around and frightened them into their houses. Oh! yes, they've got homes to beat the band; but I didn't care to wait just then and make their acquaintance. That deer was enough for one day."

"It gets better and better the further we go. I can see where we keep busy all day and every day, with those things to look after. Honestly, it's my opinion there's been no human being in this particular section since Uncle Abner last left here, a sick man, never to return. Strange that it should be so, but

it might happen that way in a certain place; difficult to reach. Why, some say beaver-tail is prime eating; and we may even have other queer dishes before we leave here. A fellow never knows how the other half of the world lives until he gets around, does he?"*

And Anson, who had traveled all over Europe and even to far-away Asia and Japan, laughed, and admitted that there was a world of truth in what Caleb had discovered.

* At the present writing beavers are protected in New York State.—Author.

CHAPTER V.

WORK IN THE SWAMP.

When Caleb started out on the following morning he carried a dozen of the No. 0 Newhouse steel traps with him, some of which had done loyal duty before in this very region, when Uncle Abner took furs along the creek and in the big swamp.

He also wore high rubber boots, carried his rifle along, and had a bite of lunch in his pocket, looking to a possible all-day job.

There were signs that led him to believe the fine weather might take a turn for the worse presently, and as they had talked this matter over during their breakfast Anson remained at the camp to chop a supply of wood, which could be stored away and kept for an emergency.

During the winter there would frequently come times when it might be difficult to get wood, and a reserve supply would come in handy.

As a usual thing Anson, not caring to always hunt, meant to take upon himself the care of the fire, since his chum would find handling the traps and preparing the furs about all he could do, besides his share of camp work.

Before starting out Caleb had sought to get all the information possible from the boy who had been there, as to the location and appearance of the camp.

He had been in such places before, and knew what they looked like; but it was different now when he had business with the keen-scented rats that burrowed under the banks and driftwood.

It was not the intention of the young trapper to disturb the little colony of beaver as yet, for he wished to have a chance to observe their labors, never before having been in the vicinity of such clever animals.

When the time seemed ripe no doubt they would have to pay toll also to that ambition for an education that possessed him; for with a trapper such a thing as pity cannot be allowed, though he may dislike to cause unnecessary pain while following his vocation.

Of course the simplest way of reaching the swamp would be by following up the creek, since this was the natural outlet of the morass; later on when they became more familiar with the country doubtless they would be able to take a short cut across lots that might save considerable walking; but Caleb did not care to assume any chances of getting lost at this early stage of the game.

Besides, he wanted to see what the country was like close to the stream.

He was careful never to step near the top of the bank, remembering how he had set his preliminary traps the day before, and that while mink seldom move around during the daytime, still sharp eyes and sharper ears might detect his presence, and injure the chances of success later on.

With this in his mind he determined to find a way back home without using the stream at all; and Anson must be warned to avoid that region all he possibly could in the future.

After a very interesting walk Caleb arrived at the foot of the swamp.

He approached very softly, desirous of surprising Mr. Beaver at work; and the first sound he heard was a violent whack! whack! as of a board being slapped on the surface of the water.

Then he knew that he had failed to count on the wind, and that the shrewd little woodcutters had scented his presence, the flap of a tail being the signal for disappearing; and not a beaver was in sight when he looked out from the thicket he was using as a shelter in approaching.

"Better luck next time," said Caleb, smiling at his defeat; and then after a glance at

the fresh evidence of work upon a tree that had evidently been felled across the creek the previous night, and which the beaver were cutting into several lengths, he passed on.

Now he began to wade, which was the main idea of his donning rubber boots.

Like all other fur-bearing animals the muskrat is keen of scent, and suspicious of mankind.

In trapping him the best way is to use a boat if possible, and next to that don rubber boots and keep in the water, which leaves no trail.

Caleb had learned from his chum that it would be impossible to get around in the swamp where the rats were with even a light canoe; and besides, such a cranky craft is not fitted to work from, a flat-bottomed skiff being necessary, or at least one that is stanch and steady.

After getting some little distance away from the quarters of the broadtails, Caleb believed it was time he started in business, so he began to keep a smart lookout for signs of the first muskrat burrow.

This animal cannot live under the water beyond a limited number of minutes, and yet the entrance to their burrows, for cunning purposes, is invariably just below the surface.

It is best to set the trap just within the entrance of the burrow, fastening the end of the chain as far in the water as it will go.

The object of this is obvious, when it is understood that if a muskrat is caught in a trap on dry land he will invariably gnaw his foot off unless quickly bagged; and in this case he is drowned, thus preventing escape, or frightening other animals by his cries.

If it is impossible to find their burrows, as sometimes happens, the shrewd trapper has a method for circumventing his wily game, one which has been successful in thousands of cases.

He plants his trap about seven or eight inches from the bank in a place which he has reason to believe the rats frequent, and secures the chain in deep water; but the trap itself must not be more than three inches below the surface, since it is designed to have the furry quarry stand erect, and place his hind feet in the fatal circle, setting off the trigger by his weight.

A stick is thrust firmly into the mud alongside the trap, with the top projecting about half a foot above the surface; then on this secure tightly part of an ear of corn, half an apple or a carrot, to serve as an attraction; and if you have it, touch the same with a little

muskrat bait, which will be apt to draw attention to the feast prepared.

In four cases out of five you will find your trap occupied in the morning, if these directions have been carefully carried out, no human scent left, and there are muskrats in the vicinity.

Caleb knew all about this thing, for he had caught these animals before, and the copious notes of Uncle Ab gave him such points as he might have skipped in his own practical experience.

He soon had half a dozen of the traps put out, and was making famous progress when the sun reached its highest point for the day.

Feeling a bit hungry he sat down upon the bank and munched the "snack" he had had the forethought to thrust into his coat pocket before starting.

It tasted mighty good, and he finished it to the last crumb.

Just as he was about to get up and enter the water again, for he had a few more traps to place, he saw a ripple out upon the swamp and realized that some animal was swimming toward the stick upon which he had, half an hour previously, stuck an attractive carrot, with a dash of the strong scent purchased from the fur house in St. Louis.

Caleb kept as still as a mouse and watched, realizing that here was an unexpected chance to see how the scheme worked.

Evidently the denizens of the swamp were rather unsophisticated—there had not been a human being around for so long that they knew little or nothing about the clever devices used to entrap their species; and this fellow, having his nose in the air, as he poked out of his burrow somewhere near, had caught the attractive odor from the scented carrot, and was making a bee-line in that direction in order to investigate.

Poor chap, he found out speedily enough; and Caleb felt a twinge of remorse in his heart as he saw the muskrat stand upright on his hind legs and endeavor to reach the alluring bait with his front paws.

He was not the first victim to appetite by a good deal.

There was instantly a commotion in the water, for undoubtedly the trap had been sprung by the sudden pressure from his hind feet.

Caleb leaped to his feet in some excitement. realizing that he would now see whether his work could pass muster; and standing there he was a witness to the drowning of the furry swamp citizen.

When the tragedy was complete he waded in and secured the muskrat, knocking him over the head to make sure that life was extinct; after which he set the trap again, positive that he would find another victim when he came in the morning, for the swamp was fairly alive with the species.

Even such a little thing as this gave him encouragement.

He crushed the feeling of resentment that strove to arise in his breast, for if he expected to make a success of this thing he could not afford to be squeamish.

It took him just another hour to set the remainder of the traps, and then he had a string of eighteen, which he deemed sufficient for this species of fur.

Noting the location of the camp on the rough map he carried, and how it might best be reached from the swamp, he set out to see if he could make a direct line of it, blazing the trees as he went, so that if successful he would have a marked path to follow going and coming.

In this way he would avoid disturbing the beaver colony, and at the same time give the mink along the stream a chance to become acquainted with the nice holes dug for their accommodation by a kind gentleman, who had

apparently had nothing else to do but go around helping others remove their coats.

By taking an occasional observation, and paying heed to the little compass he carried. Caleb made a clever job of his short-cut, reaching camp without the least trouble in an hour after he started from the swamp.

The afternoon was half over, and Anson had piled up a fine lot of splendid firewood against an evil day when they might be in dire need.

He was not in sight, and had evidently stepped out to see whether there might be any more game around needing attention; for Anson was anxious to do his duty as purveyor to the trapping camp, and did not believe in neglecting golden opportunities.

Caleb was resting by the fire about half an hour later when he heard two shots in rapid succession some distance away.

He listened to see whether there would be any other sign, for they had arranged a series of signals between them, looking to any possible trouble; but only silence ensued.

"I reckon Ans got something that time—rabbit, partridge, or perhaps 'coon. I wonder if he would dare try to have a 'coon for dinner. I think I'd draw the line at that, unless mighty near starvation point. Well,

he'll be coming in soon, so there's little use speculating on his bag," and Caleb occupied his time spreading the first muskrat skin upon the thin board carried for the purpose.

Much of his spare time around the campfire would now be taken up in making these boards, looking after the furs that were drying, and kindred pursuits; for during the season a tanner has a multitude of things to take up his moments.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONCH SIGNAL.

Somewhat to the surprise of Caleb as time passed on Anson failed to show up.

Perhaps he had continued his hunt, not being satisfied with what success he might have already had.

As the day drew near its close Caleb began preparations for supper, cutting a thick steak from the haunch of venison, which was keeping well in the cold, for they had hung it from a tree where it was supposed no animal could reach it.

When it began to grow dark he found himself a bit worried, since his chum was still conspicuous only by his absence.

"I hope nothing could have happened to 'Ans. What sort of an accident would be apt to strike him—he's too careful a hunter to draw his gun after him, and besides, there are no fences to climb here. As to animals, I hardly think there are any we should fear, such as a panther or bear. Perhaps he's gone and got lost, for I had the only compass we own, 'Anson not intending to leave camp. That would be kind of tough; and it has begun to get cloudy as if a storm might blow up."

It was a thought that made Caleb uneasy, and several times during his labor of preparing the meal he stepped outside and listened to catch any sound that would indicate the coming of his pard.

Darkness had now come on.

The moon was hidden by a bank of black clouds, so that over the whole region a gloomy pall seemed to rest.

At length Caleb could stand it no longer, and stepping to the door he blew hard and long upon the conch shell that had been carried for the purpose of signaling.

The sound echoed from distant mountain peaks, and any one miles away might have imagined it the defiant call of a bull moose looking for trouble.

Hardly had the resonant sound died away in the distance before there was a shot up the valley, and not more than half a mile away.

That pleased Caleb more than he could tell, for he realized that his comrade was coming, and would ere long appear.

Nevertheless he thought it his duty to step to the door every few minutes, and awaken the echoes by a blast upon the old conch shell.

Finally a shout from the darkness announced that Anson was at hand.

Caleb went about getting the last of the sup-

per ready for the table, knowing that his chum would be exhausted and hungry when he came in.

At length Anson strode into the cabin, looking a bit morose and weary.

He tossed a couple of partridges down, looked at his friend's preparations for the meal, and then broke out into a laugh.

"Oh, I'm a fine hunter, all right. Actually got lost, and have been wandering around like a regular tenderfoot for some hours. Don't see how I came to lose my bearings so easy; but the woods are mighty thick up where I found those birds. I missed the compass and just got twisted, that's all," he said.

"The best of wood rangers may do the same once in a while. And as I've got a trail blazed between here and the swamp I want you to always carry the compass in your wanderings after this. It would be tough all around if you did get lost in earnest—tough on you, and mighty lonely for me. But pull up and have some of this fine venison steak—a little dry, but tasty enough. I bet you're hungry, all right."

"Say, don't mention it, please. I could bite a nail in two, I believe. And I see you didn't lose any time getting your first pelt up yonder in the swamp."

"The little fool insisted on getting caught right under my eyes, and I had to take him in out of the wet," laughed Caleb.

"Wow! I can see where they're going to keep you busy pretty soon, pard. Seems to me everything up here is just as accommodating as you please, just fairly aching for attention. These partridges, for instance, flew up into a tree and sat there on the lower limb asking me if I thought they would look good on a spit. I said I believed I'd like to try them, and after that it was one, two for theirs. But that venison is all right, old man—couldn't have cooked it better myself, and that's saying something, for you know if there's one accomplishment I'm proud of my ability to wrestle with pots and pans. Born in me I guess; had a granddaddy who was a noted caterer in New York City years ago, equal to Delmonico. Now tell me about your day—did you catch a glimpse of Mr. Beavertail?"

"No, but I heard him all right, slapping the water like a good fellow to warn his tribe I was coming. When I peeked out they had vanished; but they're a busy lot I tell you, and during the night cut down another tree, which is being divided into logs for their dam. Seems to me they're late building it; but from what I saw I imagine the last storm we had washed

their other one away. They'll get it done perhaps before winter actually sets in."

As they ate, Caleb described his doings of the day, and in all of which his chum evinced the keenest interest; Anson had never done any trapping, but he was already commencing to feel that it amounted to considerable to pit one's wits in a fight for supremacy against the natural cunning of these little varmints; and as time passed he might even find a spark of enthusiasm for the game.

In turn he related how he had shot the partridges far up the valley in a section that was new to him; and then followed by getting himself twisted in the most unaccountable manner.

All these things were profitable to the boys, since they served as warnings that might prevent even more serious accidents in the future.

Had it been a bitter night in mid-winter, with a blizzard bearing down upon them, Anson might have suffered severely before once again finding himself at the camp, where food and shelter awaited him.

He had noticed the signs of a storm and was glad when the sound of the conch gave him his bearings at last.

Before they retired the wind was commencing to howl through the valley, and the hem-

locks to moan before its force, so that they knew they were in for a wild night.

Uncle Abe had built his cabin in a favored spot, however, and they need not fear that disaster could overtake them, no matter how violent the tempest; for trees and projecting rocks protected them against the worst of the gale, no matter what direction it came from.

All through the night it howled and moaned about the camp, and several times Caleb crawled out of his warm bunk to replenish the fire and take a peep outdoors, for it seemed as though the pine under which the cabin stood might be leveled by the force of the wind.

But morning found things about as usual, only that it had become decidedly colder, and looked as if winter might be drawing close.

The sky had cleared again, and the sun peeped up as usual while they were eating breakfast.

Caleb started out wearing his rubber boots again, and carrying a number of traps with him. He expected to be back by noon, gathering what victims chanced to be in the traps already set, and placing the others in several places he had marked while on the way back to camp the preceding day.

At one spot where he had seen signs of a fox runway he left a trap, baited in a most

appetizing manner; and taking especial pains to remove all traces of human presence by a judicious use of the trail scent carried for that urpose.

Once at the swamp he left the half-dozen traps on the bank, and made his rounds.

Doubtless the storm of the night had prevented the best results, but Caleb was pleased to take seven fine muskrats from the water, and reset the traps.

Then he placed those steel snares which he had brought along, making just two dozen in all set in the swamp; if he needed any of these later for mink they could easily be transferred to new localities.

Next in order was the job of removing the skins of his catch, for it was not wise to lug the carcasses all the way to camp, if time could be taken to do the job nearer where they were caught.

While this task may seem cumbersome at first one soon becomes quite adept at it, and so Caleb had the seven skins tied together before a great while had elapsed, and was walking toward home.

The sun was at its highest point, and his appetite growing voracious.

Anson had put in the morning doing various things that he had on his list, and did not seem

disposed to take a turn around with his gun; they had plenty of game for immediate purposes, and besides these other things were necessary in his eyes; for the boy was inclined to be what Caleb called "fincky" about things pertaining to bodily comfort, and would by degrees reduce things to a system, so that with the least exertion everything must move like clock-work.

He had the venison on a pulley, and when they wished to cut a piece off all that was necessary was to unfasten the cord, lower away, and having secured what was wanted, draw it up again to its lofty perch.

"From the marks under the hemlock I guess the smell of that fresh meat drew a few pilgrims around some time during last night. One was a fox I'm dead sure, but the others may have been 'coons only, though there's one big print that it seems to me must have been made by a lynx or wildcat."

"That isn't the finest thing to know, that if a fellow steps outdoors of an evening he's liable to have a lucivee jump on his shoulders, and take off an ear. I guess we'll have to lay for that chap, and add his pelt to those drying on the boards yonder. While I think of it I'll be getting a board ready for him," remarked Caleb, carelessly.

"Well, I like that. You seem to think it's a foregone conclusion that because a wildcat chooses to prowl around here one night, he's as good as bagged. It's a great thing to have confidence, I see," laughed the other.

"Figure it out for yourself and see. If that chap would some around a night such as the last one, he'll remember the beautiful scent he had and shy up here again as sure as you live, before another sun. Perhaps before we go to bed we may have a visit from him; it all depends on how hungry the brute is. Anyhow I'm going to set a trap for nim, all right. A nice lynx skin would just fit in my collection fine."

So during the afternoon Caleb lowered the bundle of meat a little, leaving it just far enough below the limb of the hemlock so that a bobcat would have to leap down in order to land on the package; he also fixed some sort of contraption with a cord leading into the cabin, so that if the meat were violently shaken a jingling sound would follow, and give warning that the expected visitor had actually arrived.

Caleb was so very solicitous after the comfort of his guests, and did not like to keep any one waiting longer than was absolutely

necessary; it is a good trait to encourage, even in a young trapper.

The partridges made them an excellent supper, to which, of course, both lads did ample justice; for in this bracing air it seemed as though they were hungry an hour after they had dined, and the prospect of catering to such ferocious appetites for a long stretch of many weeks was a problem that they must solve as they went along.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE LYNX LOST.

The boys sat up rather late that evening.

Caleb wanted to give his lynx trap a fair show; and besides, he was very busy making stretchers for the skins he anticipated bringing in on the following day; while Anson had started to write up their adventures, and was deeply engrossed in his work.

Without the slightest warning there was a sudden jingling close beside Anson that made him jump as if shot.

Caleb reached out his hand and took hold of his rifle; there was a smile on his face as he looked at his chum, as if to say:

"What did I tell you?"

On his part Anson snatched for his Marlin; but he had had orders not to use it save as a last resort, for it was apt to mar the skin of the beast; and remembering the part he was to play he lighted a little bullseye lantern.

Then Caleb stepped quietly to the door, which he opened enough to allow of their slipping out.

The moon was shining, but under the heavy hemlock it was dark enough, and Anson realized that his comrade had known what he was

about when he arranged to get the benefit of the bullseye in locating this visitor.

No sooner did he issue from the cabin than he turned the light upward toward the spot where the bundle of venison hung.

Already had Caleb detected a pair of glittering yellow eyes against the dark hemlock branches; and as his chum thus brought the little searchlight to bear he could see the crouching figure of the cat, hanging to the swaying bundle, and loth to either leap back to the tree or to the ground far below.

They could hear a low, venomous growling proceeding from the beast, and it was evident that this interruption to its plans for a royal supper was not relished in the least by the intended diner.

Even the mildest mannered man in the world will prove testy upon being delayed in the pleasing duty of catering to his appetite; and a lynx has an exceedingly short temper.

"Steady—I see him. Look out when he jumps!" said Caleb.

In his other hand Anson held the hatchet which he usually carried swinging from his belt, hunter fashion, while in the woods; and this he now raised half threateningly, so as to be ready for emergencies, for he knew that

a wounded bobcat or lynx is a dangerous customer indeed.

What with the swaying and turning bundle, and the unsteady light, Caleb could not make sure of his aim in a second, but continued to follow the motions of the object up near the branches of the hemlock, his rifle ready to spit out its contents at the bare touch of his finger-tip.

Then came the sharp report.

Caleb jumped back as soon as he had fired, anticipating a leap on the part of the animal, whether mortally injured or not; and at the same time he whirled his gun around to be used as a club in self-defense.

There was a cry from Anson, followed by the thud of a blow.

"That got him all, I guess," shouted the one who held the lantern, trying to focus its rays upon a struggling form upon the ground.

Caleb sprang forward, intending to strike with his rifle; but apparently it was not necessary, for the animal seemed to be kicking his last, the double portion of lead and cold steel being too much for even a strenuous lynx to stand.

"Everything comes to him who waits," exclaimed Anson, exultantly, as they bent over and examined the defunct beast, which was

of an unusual size, and possessed a coat of fur that made the young trapper's eyes shine.

"At any rate variety's the spice of life, and he'll add to the stock. Thought he was in for a jolly good dinner from our venison; but found there's many a slip between the cup and the lip. My jingle bell worked like a charm, too, didn't it?" asked Caleb, taking hold of the dead beast to feel his weight.

"Nearly scared me out of a year's growth, that's what. Thought for the second something had jumped at me, you know. Well, now that the game's over, I move we crawl into our bunks. I can hardly keep my peepers open," yawned the hunter.

They had no further alarm that night; for if the mate of the lynx hovered in the neighborhood they heard nothing from it.

So another day opened.

Caleb was counting the time, and anxiously waiting until it would be proper for him to look up the mink holes along the creek.

Again he set out for the swamp, only this time he carried no traps, having quite a sufficiency in that quarter.

Working down toward the end of the swamp he finished with nine muskrats as a total and was fully satisfied

It was still early, and he spent some time

in taking off the pelts, at which business he was now getting to be quite an adept.

Thinking that as the wind was now right he would like to see what the industrious beaver at the commencement of the stream were doing, he crept cautiously along until finally he peered out from a screen of brush and had a full view of the whole situation.

There were three of them in sight, and all working like—well, as Anson afterward said when told of it "like beaver," cutting down another tree, slapping mud over the dam already constructed, nosing stones into place, and bustling around as if fully conscious of the fact that the time for such labor was now limited, and they must make haste if they expected to accomplish the task they had set out to perform.

Caleb watched for nearly half an hour, and was deeply interested.

He made up his mind that he would not try to take any of these singular and amusing animals unless it seemed positively necessary to eke out his store of furs, looking toward that term at college.

Suddenly they all scampered away, and vanished under the water at a signal of alarm from the old fellow who had been sitting erect on the lookout.

Supposing they had been frightened by his presence in the vicinity, and that he must have made some incautious movement, Caleb was just about to rise and walk back to where he had hung his pelts from a limb, when he caught a strange sniffing sound that aroused his curiosity immediately, and he sank back in his retreat.

Then out of the copse further down the shore of the swamp on the other side of the creek a moving object caught his eye, a black animal that came shuffling to the edge of the water, and bent down to drink, or reach in after something.

Caleb felt his pulses thrill with sudden excitement, for he was looking upon his first wild bear, in its native haunts.

A lynx last night, and he was now fated to bag a big black bear today—the very idea gave him a sensation of elation, and his hand was trembling as he gripped his rifle and began to bring it around so as to find his shoulder.

He may have been incautious, or else the bear was looking exactly in that direction, for with a quick, startled snort it wheeled and made off.

He knew he had very little chance to win out, but the temptation to shoot was too great

to be resisted, and with a snap aim Caleb let fly.

Down went the bear, rolling over and over; then scrambling to its feet away it bounded at the fastest pace it was capable of putting up; and Caleb, grievously disappointed, saw no more of it, for that day at least.

He had the curiosity to walk over, after seeing that his rifle was in condition for business again, and examine the ground; and it gave him some satisfaction to find spots of blood as proof that he had not missed entirely; at the same time he was sorry that he had wounded the animal without securing him.

"And he had a simply magnificent shaggy skin, that would have been a splendid addition to my stock," he complained to Anson, when narrating the event.

"Perhaps it may be my good luck to bowl him over some day, who knows? I reckon this valley is his cruising territory, and sooner or later we may run across him, in the spring if not now, for bears lie low all winter, and sleep. I wish you'd tripped the old chief up, for bear meat is worth while, if you only know how to cook it. It isn't every fellow who does, but trust your Uncle Anson for getting onto that wrinkle. It sometimes pays to have an eminent chef in the family; and inherit his

knack for making tasty dishes out of almost nothing."

There was something in the other's smile that warned Caleb he had some secret; but since it seemed to give Ans so much pleasure he would not try to penetrate the same, leaving that for him to disclose at his pleasure.

After they had partaken of the venison stew that night the cook brought out a dish from the oven that aroused Caleb's suspicions at once; and yet it certainly did have an appetizing odor that, had he been extremely hungry, might have appealed hugely to his olfactory organs.

"Name it!" he exclaimed, seeing Anson cutting up one of the two little animals that somewhat resembled squirrels.

"A famous old Indian dish," said Anson, tasting, and then seeming to ruminate.

"Musquash!" exclaimed the other, drawing back.

"Try it and see. Perhaps I made a mistake in having that blamed old venison stew first, for it took away the edge of our appetites. I don't think I just hanker after this dish, though I can see how a fellow might call it fine if real good and hungry. If we get hard pushed we'll have to turn to our friends of the swamp; but so far as I'm concerned I think

there are plenty of other things I like better, and within reach, too," observed Anson.

Caleb was of the same opinion, though he ate a small portion of the browned musquash, and pronounced it not at all bad.

At any rate, the curiosity of the cook had been satisfied, for he would never have been happy had they spent the whole winter up there in the wilderness without trying one mess of the Indian dish.

"What will you spring on me next, beaver-tails perhaps; but I'd like to let those busyboys alone if we can, for I've taken a great fancy for them. Wait till you creep up there some day and watch the hustling colony at work. It would really be a shame to annihilate them, and they so scarce in the Adirondacks nowadays. But where on earth did you get these two chaps?"

"Knocked 'em over when out yesterday morning, and hid 'em before coming in, meaning to spring a surprise on you. Perhaps I don't know just how to cook musquash—you see they didn't have such delicacies in New York, and my illustrious ancestor, the great chef, never mentions 'em in his book. Some time I must go to the Indians, and learn how they do it; for I imagine there's a secret about the way they're cooked that makes all the dif-

ference. Well, we've had all we want of 'em, and the foxes can feast on the remains. I'll carry them out and bury 'em."

"And by the way, were the skins quite ruined when you shot the beggars?" asked Caleb, with a grin.

"Pretty badly rattled; you see I was close, and the shot tore a hole in each varmint; and what was left I just demolished getting the skin off. I shot them down the creek in the morning, which accounted for your not hearing more than my two shots in the afternoon. Well, I won't waste good pelts again, I promise you," and Anson carried the pan containing the musquash outside.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANSON AND THE BEAR.

Thus a week slipped by. The stock of musk-rat furs increased day by day, until it was now an even sixty.

Perhaps this could not keep up much longer, since the rodents were beginning to show signs of more wariness, and on the last day Caleb thought it best to change some of the traps that had not proven profitable, placing them further in the swamp, but always marking the place with a bit of red flannel, so that he might not get mixed up, and lose any of his precious traps.

Now he considered it in order to get after Mr. Mink, who had been given ample time to become acquainted with the lovely holes along the bank of the creek, and should be held up for the rent by the landlord.

So in the canoe he set out with traps and everything necessary to lay pitfalls for his confiding tenants.

It took him all morning to get the traps set, and he could hardly wait for the next day to come in order to ascertain whether he had met with a fair measure of success or not; for Caleb did not count himself an experienced hand at

this sort of business, and mink are especially difficult to trap, being unusually cautious and wary.

Anson had taken to roaming around with an idea that he might strike the spoor of Caleb's black friend, Mr. Bear; but as yet that pleasure had been denied him. Nor had he seen another chance to knock down a deer, and their supply of venison was getting rather low; but today he had taken lunch with him, also the compass and a larger supply of ammunition than ordinary, and had hiked away up the valley determined to ascertain what lay there, and explore new territory.

He could not expect to have much more time to do this, for as the end of October drew closer so would the cold increase; and at any day they might get a foot of snow that would keep them stormbound a while.

Thus it was apt to prove a red letter day for both lads, since the trapper had put out his mink snares with great care, and the hunter was roaming far afield, bent on big game.

After fixing the traps along the creek, Caleb paddled back, left the canoe, snatched a bite or two at the camp, and then set out for the swamp, for his game preserve in that locality needed attention.

There were six muskrats in the toils, which

he attended to promptly, and when on the way back, stepping aside to look at the fox trap set in the runway, he was surprised and pleased to find a fine red fellow with a charming brush caught by the forefoot.

Caleb speedily placed him out of pain, and carried him bodily to the camp, so that he could remove the skin at his leisure, for he had never handled a fox, and it required special attention.

Really, it was beginning to look very like a genuine trappers' camp around the old cabin under the whispering pine, with all those furs drying in the air; and the boy was elated at the prospect of accomplishing the task he had set himself—there had been some among his young friends who had sneered at the idea of a green hand expecting to outwit those clever animals who often prove more than a match for veterans; but neither taunts nor jeers had changed Caleb's mind one iota, after he had settled upon his plans.

The afternoon passing away warned him that he had better start upon preparations for the evening meal again, since Anson had probably gone further than he intended, and would therefore be late in coming.

He hoped it was not another case of getting lost; but then that did not seem likely, since he

now carried the compass with him all the time, and besides, was much more familiar with the lay of the land in the broad valley.

It might be he had struck big game, and was detained getting it in readiness to transport to the camp.

Caleb hoped the last was the case, for they would soon need more meat, unless they began too heavily upon their stock of provisions.

In the gloaming he heard his chum's hallo, which he answered with a blast on the conch, and some twenty minutes later Anson staggered up to the door of the cabin, loaded down with something or other.

No sooner did Caleb set eyes on him than he gave a whoop.

"You got my bear, did you? I hope the skin wasn't badly injured by your old buckshot. Did you see where I hit him that time? Here, let me take it off your back. Ain't he the beauty, though, smooth as velvet, and so warm? We need an extra cover, and here it is. Where did you find the old sinner, Ans? Bet he was running yet from fright at my marksmanship. Well, sit down, and make yourself at home. Supper's all ready, and you deserve the best, after that day."

So Caleb rattled on, and his chum answered not a word, for he was utterly out of breath

from the terrific exertion of toting that heavy skin, together with a lot of the choice portions of the bear for several miles.

If it hadn't been mostly down-grade Anson would never have made it.

When he had rested a bit, and washed up, supper was laid on the rough but serviceable table, and the two hungry lads fell to.

Of course Anson had to tell how he had come upon tracks of Bruin far above any place he had up to that day visited, and followed them persistently for two hours, when the beast had suddenly started out of the thicket just before him.

He had fired hastily and missed, whereupon the bear had turned in a rage and charged him.

Anson waited, reserving his second barrel until the animal should be almost upon him, for he knew that if he failed to stop Bruin with that he was in for the worst scrape of his life, as a fight with a wounded bear at close quarters, with only a hunting knife to depend upon, is no child's play.

When within twenty feet of him, seeing that the boy did not run, the animal reared upon his hind feet, and came forward menacingly.

It was very simple after that.

Anson laughed at the guile of the poor crea-

ture, in thus opening up a vulnerable spot for the accommodation of the hunter; all he had to do was to aim directly for the heart and pull trigger, when the tragedy was complete.

"I thought for the moment I might have to take to a tree, and I could imagine myself playing all sorts of fancy stunts climbing, with that rascal in full pursuit; but happily it wasn't necessary. He keeled over with a grunt and a few kicks and the game was won. I spent three mortal hours wrestling with that plagued skin, and cutting the brute up so I could handle him—part of the meat I hung up in a tree to be fetched home tomorrow, and the rest is here," concluded the successful nimrod, proudly.

"Wish I could go after it for you, old chap; but tomorrow promises to be a very busy day for a fellow about my size, and I'll have to beg off. Suppose you leave it to the next day, and we can go together; I'll take a holiday for once, and let the traps rest a spell," remarked Caleb.

"Done. We don't see any too much of each other, anyway, pard."

"I hope you didn't injure the skin in taking it off. So far as I've seen, it appears to be all right. I'm glad I gave you those lessons the other night when you asked about some-

thing or other. It's a dandy, sure enough. My! doesn't it feel soft though. The poor old chap didn't dream he was growing a coat for us this season, did he? Well, where ignorance is bliss it's folly to be wise."

They spent another happy evening chatting and working, each busy at some favorite job that needed attention.

Caleb had discovered the home of a family of otters in the stream, and was now studying all his uncle had written about these interesting little animals, the sleek furs from whose backs bring such good prices in the marts of trade.

"I'd just like to get a few of them before the ice comes, for after that I may have more trouble, lacking the experience. My success with the muskrats makes me think I've got it in me to be a fairly decent trapper of all kinds of varmints; though they do say otter are the slickest things that crawl," he remarked, as he laid a couple of selected traps aside for the morning.

"They look it, I'm bound to say, with a sort of weasel sharpness about them that other animals fail to have, unless it might be the fox," said Anson.

"That reminds me, I didn't show you my windfall of this afternoon," and so he held up

the beautiful pelt of the red fox, which as yet he had not stretched.

"Hello! you got a sly old Reynard, eh? Well, all I can say is that you're certainly the boss trapper, Caleb Cushing, and if you don't go to college next year it'll be because the bottom had dropped out of the fur market, and Funston says there never was such a demand for good pelts as this year. Now, if you could only get one of those silver foxes they talk about, that would just about fix you for keeps. Some of them are worth a thousand dollars for a single fur."

"I know it, for I've read about them. The enormous price the skins fetch has induced several parties to try and raise silver foxes in confinement. Reds and grays have been artificially raised without trouble; but no one ever succeeded in getting silver fox young—'cause why? They're a freak, that's all, and even if a pair of silver foxes worth two thousand dollars had a litter of babies the youngsters would be either red or gray—they go right back to the original stock. So a freak they'll be to the end of the chapter, one being found here, and another three hundred miles away, but only a few each season. That's the cause of the thousand dollar mark. No, I hardly think I'll be lucky enough to strike a silver fox up here,

though uncle says in his logbook that he caught one about five years before he gave up."

Evidently Anson could not give his chum much information in connection with the habits of animals, for Caleb had studied them all his life, and particularly since conceiving this idea of spending a season among the mountains.

That night was very long to Caleb.

He woke up several times, and found himself wondering whether any of the creek denizens had stepped into the traps he had slyly placed in the mouths of the holes after the most approved method described by Uncle Ab.

Twice he stepped to the door to take a look at the weather, fearful lest it might come up a storm that would prevent him from making the rounds, and thus try his patience still further.

But this did not happen, and the morning broke with a prospect of a fairly decent day ahead, so that after a hasty breakfast he set out for the spot where the first mink trap had been set.

Entering the stream, which was showing a skim of ice in sheltered places, where an eddy kept the current from stirring things up, he moved along carefully and drew near the spot.

That trap had not been sprung, and Caleb

naturally felt disappointed, fearing lest after all he lacked the experience and knowledge necessary to outwit the cunning mink; but upon coming to the second spot he found the trap gone, and as he drew the chain in discovered a sleek little animal held by its left hind foot, and, of course, stone dead, having drowned shortly after being caught.

And somehow Caleb felt prouder of his first mink than of the sixty-odd muskrats, the skins of which were being dried in camp—it seemed more royal game.

CHAPTER IX.

NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN DAYS.

By the time Caleb had gone over his entire string and come near the outlet of the swamp he found that he had just six fine mink, and his spirits were soaring very high as a result of his success in trapping this much sought after and cunning animal.

He had good reason to believe that there were many more of the same type to be found along the stream, and from time to time hoped to add to his collection such of their number as he could hoodwink into stepping into his snares.

While in the vicinity he considered it the part of wisdom to visit the other lot of traps in the swamp, and from these took eight musk-rats, so that altogether he had his hands full attending to the bunch after arriving at camp; for on this occasion he preferred bringing the game intact, so that Anson might see what a royal collection it was.

"Why, if a fellow only had a month of weather like this he could ask no more the whole season; but I'm afraid we're pretty close to the windup of fall, and winter is ready to pounce down on us in earnest. Sev-

eral signs told me that today, and while I don't pose as a prophet, watch and see," he remarked, while stretching the mink pelts over the boards very carefully.

"Oh! you bird of evil, croaking in that strain. How do you know but what the season may hold out some weeks yet? Stranger things have happened, and we seem to have luck with us. Never mind, as things go your future seems assured and college within your grasp. But if I know you right you'll keep right on just as if the biggest kind of doubt existed. Now, here goes to try some of that bear. I've been posting myself on how to cook it to bring out the special qualities of the meat, and you might as well get ready for a feast."

It can readily be seen how these two jolly lads entertained each other while in camp, engaged upon their manifold duties; both of them had admirable qualities that wore well under stress, and such royal chaps make the finest of camp-mates.

There is no place for a pessimist in camp; when the wind blows and the tent has to be held down by all hands for an hour, with the rain pelting each man to the skin, then is the time for the optimist to make light of trouble,

and let his merry laugh put fresh heart into the balance of the water-logged crew.

Anson was this kind of fellow, and Caleb, while perhaps a shade less given to joking and merriment, because of the serious problems he had been compelled to face at an early age, nevertheless of a cheery disposition, and could hold up his end in wit and repartee.

The man who could find fault with the meal Ans put upon the table that night would deserve to go hungry the rest of his days.

While it may appear that appetite and the satisfying of the same fill considerable space in a story of the woods, how can it be otherwise, when the ozone of outdoors has such an effect upon the human frame that every one seems hungry all of the time, and the talk is generally "shop"—wherewith shall we be fed?

To the natural man this question of eating is a big thing, and it is no wonder that a couple of growing lads should give it such prominence in their notes of camp life in the wilderness.

Besides the bear steak, juicy, and just cooked enough to taste well, Anson had boiled some sweet potatoes for a treat, and browned them alongside the meat.

Then he had boiled rice, with rich evap-

orated cream, and sugar for dessert, and a pannikin of Ceylon tea that both boys were very fond of, using coffee during the other meals, or at least for breakfast.

Given an appetite that fairly clamored for attention, and it would seem as if such a bill of fare might prove attractive, especially as there was ample of the food to satisfy their full wants.

How delightful it was to lie back on a blanket, with a head rest, and one's feet to the fire, enjoying the latter to the full, while the wind sang loudly of the cold Northland without, and rushed through pine and hemlock with the noisy bustle of an express train.

Anson puffed away at his pipe as he wrote up his account of the day's doings, and Caleb whittled on new stretching boards.

No doubt the scene would come vividly back to both lads in future years when they had grappled with the problems of the big world, and were engrossed in the business of making names for themselves; and always must it bring a smile of joy, for such reminiscences soften the vigor of commercial or professional activity.

Caleb was, nevertheless, a true prophet on this occasion, for winter did come down upon

them in another day, and with a promise of staying.

Then began a new sort of existence, for with the mercury hovering many degrees below the freezing point it was not so pleasant to be handling traps around the water, and especially when the animals to be snared were such as must have access to streams.

But the boy who had started in to get an education was not the one to let anything daunt him, and no matter what the weather he kept up his round of visiting his lines of traps, and attending to the same with fidelity and patience.

As it became more difficult to catch the little varmints of swamp and stream he adopted new tactics, and brought into play a reserve stock of vitality; so that as the days turned into weeks his stock of furs mounted steadily upwards in a manner that was especially gratifying.

As they planned the two lads had gone up the valley on the morning following Anson's adventure with the bear, and carried back all the meat that was worth their attention.

Caleb also enjoyed seeing what the country looked like so far away from camp; for he had been so closely confined to his business that as yet he had found no time for exploration,

leaving that to his chum, upon whom devolved the duty of securing a supply of fresh game.

Among other things which Anson had brought along as full of possibilities, were a couple of pairs of snowshoes, which he had purchased from a leading dealer in sporting goods.

Neither of the boys had ever strapped such things to their feet; but they did not anticipate any real trouble, once the conditions for using the same chanced to come about; and with the shoes were full instructions, so that a greenhorn could understand.

Before spring broke the grip of stern winter in these high mountain altitudes there were certain to be times when such articles must prove of great value to those whose duties took them afield; and as Caleb must visit his string of traps on the average of once in three days at least, while his chum wanted to keep on the constant lookout for game as long as a blizzard was not blowing, it can be readily understood how they looked upon the possession of these snowshoes as a bonanza.

Hardly a day passed without something happening that gave them a chance for discussion over the evening meal, or while they sat before the blazing hearth.

Now it was an interesting sight Caleb had

seen while making the round of his traps, perhaps connected with the beaver colony, which he was watching with great interest, and the members of which had become quite tame, seeming to realize that this strange biped had no evil intentions toward them; for they even went about their work one day when the boy sat on the bank behind some bushes, but with his presence certainly known.

Again it was Anson who had met with an adventure out of the common, which he related in his droll way, never trying to show himself up in the light of a hero, but rather to the contrary; so that his chum, reading between the lines could get a fair idea as to what the truth might be.

They also met with minor accidents, but nothing serious came to mar the pleasure of their campaign in the woods.

One day Anson declared he believed he had caught a glimpse of a panther.

This seemed so out of the common run that Caleb had him enter into full particulars, even down to describing the color of the beast that had slunk into some dense undergrowth at his approach.

The young nimrod declared it was a pearly gray, just such a color as he had seen many a time in connection with tame panthers, held

captive in museums and traveling circus animal cages; and since his description tallied with the genuine article in all particulars, Caleb was forced to admit that it seemed reasonable to believe such a ferocious beast might have come down from further north in search of food.

"If that is the case we're going to see something of the critter before winter's over, I wager," he remarked, in his convincing way.

"I may in my wanderings, and mean to be prepared by having the left barrel of my Marlin holding a buckshot shell for Mr. Panther. If I can get a fair chance I ought to puncture his aspirations; but you hear me right now admitting candidly that I'm not looking for panther. I'd rather he kept his distance. But see here, old chap, you didn't mean me when you said we'd see him sooner or later; d'ye have an idea the beast may try to steal some of our meat, just as Mr. Lynx did?"

"That was what was in my mind," returned Caleb, nodding; "it's a favorite trick on the part of a panther to hang around a camp where they have fresh meat, and make an occasional foray; just as in India his cousin the striped tiger pounces on a stray native and carries him away when hungry. I'm going to set my trap in the hemlock again, and

don't be shocked if some night you hear a tin pan tumbling all over the floor here, for that will be the signal that we have an unwelcome visitor."

He was as good as his word; but the days passed and there was no alarm, so that both boys almost forgot the affair, resting in fancied security.

Perhaps this was because game was still fairly plentiful out in the snowy woods, and the panther could make an occasional "kill."

When matters came to a standstill in this particular, and hunger forced him to prowl closer to the abode of the human intruders in his native wilds, it might be they would see something of the gray terror of the pines.

When Anson was not hunting he busied himself cutting wood, for they used a tremendous amount in keeping the cabin warm.

They had hunted out all cracks and crannies where the wind found entrance, and filled them with mud, which, drying, had taken the place of plaster; so that by degrees the old shack had become impervious to draughts, and it was possible to have it very comfortable even on the most bitter night.

December crept on apace, and Christmas found them going about their various duties with unabated zeal. Caleb daily adding more

or less to his growing bundles of fine furs, and his chum taking on new symptoms of rugged health; for this sort of open air life was just what Anson had needed to build him up.

Neither of them as yet had found occasion to give one sigh of regret about the course they had mapped out; though naturally there were times when Caleb secretly mourned because he was away from his mother; and he spent many minutes while doing his work wondering how the dear woman was getting on without him, and if all was well in that beloved little cottage in quaint old Tedbury.

CHAPTER X.

OTTER FOR CALEB.

Success had come to Caleb with regard to the otter.

He had discovered a "runway" where they passed from the shore into the water, and taking a No. 2 Newhouse trap had set it at the foot of the "slide," in about four inches of water, staking it out deeper in the stream, so as to drown the victim when caught.

Taking the advice of his uncle, as expounded in his notebook from long experience, Caleb had weighted his trap with an old ax head found about the cabin; for it is reckoned that an otter is exceedingly hard to drown, and apt to get away if ordinary devices that suffice for mink are tried.

Before the stream was covered by an inch of ice he had five other skins to admire, and his chum was loud in his praise of his sagacity.

"You certainly have it in your blood, old fellow. For a greenhorn who never did any trapping to speak of, you beat the band. It does me good just to see how you rake 'em in, that's what," he had declared as Caleb held up the first otter.

"I don't take much credit for it. I rather

guess any ordinary fellow could do just as well, providing he had such a great help as I have found in Uncle Ab's diary and notebook. Why, I don't know what I'd have done without it, bless his old heart. How I'd love to see him sitting by our fire here and enjoying some of your fine cookery. He used to say he never could get the hang of making halfway decent stuff to eat, and was always praising my mother's dishes up to the skies; and she doesn't pretend to be so great a hand either. He was a genial old chap, too, as you can understand after reading his notes. Well, sometimes I try to fancy him watching his nephew carry on business at the old stand, and with a few of the traps he used around here."

If the spirit of the veteran trapper hovered around his old home in the wilderness he must have been gratified at the way Caleb held him in reverence, and frequently blessed his name when success came to his efforts, thanks to the hints he found in that precious diary of Uncle Ab.

During these weeks the boys had, of course, learned many things, and naturally they found their daily tasks work easier with such lack of friction as comes with familiarity.

Anson got up some fairly ravishing dishes,

excelling all previous efforts; and his comrade declared this thing of living up in the wilds was the greatest snap a fellow could wish for, when he had a chum along who had been born with a gift for turning the most commonplace dish into such a savory mess that it might fairly tickle the palate of a king.

Of course, they had not gone without venison all this while.

Three deer had fallen to their guns, and one of these Caleb had the honor of bringing into camp, a doe that started up in his path one day, when he was heading for home, after leaving the swamp.

It always seemed like a miracle to him how he managed to bag that deer, for at the moment he was well loaded down with the fruits of two days' trapping, together with his rifle and several traps he meant to look over by the fire, oiling and fixing the same generally, since he suspected they were not working right.

He must have instinctively dropped his burden like a flash when the doe jumped up before him, and shot away with tremendous bounds, clearing logs and undergrowth with the greatest ease.

Had she gone straight ahead even then he would never have been able to plant a bullet where it would do the most good; such was the

small exposure and the speed of the flying animal that a better marksman than Caleb must have missed.

As fate would have it the doe made a sudden turn to the left, and exposed her whole side; whether she imagined she saw some enemy ahead, or an obstacle opposed her further progress in that direction he never knew; but his rifle was already at his shoulder, and with the quick report she fell dead, shot through the heart.

Anson was considerably surprised when he saw the other stagger into camp with a whole deer upon his back, and gladly went over to bring in the traps and bunch of fur-bearing animals from the spot where Caleb had hung them up in a tree.

One day the hunter came in laboring under considerable excitement.

Caleb noticed it at once.

"Met up with Mr. Panther again?" he demanded, immediately, that being the first idea that popped into his head.

"Not any, and you can't guess what I saw today, either. Gave me a weak heart, too, and I've hardly got over it yet," Anson went on.

"Of course I can't guess. Was it a ghost, or something real flesh and blood?"

"About two thousand pounds of it was, I

imagine," grinned the hunter, dropping down to rest his weary limbs.

"That's more than one of these little Adirondack bears would weigh by a jugful. What under the sun could you have run across? I wonder if some circus could have lost an elephant now, or a rhinoceros? Give it up, Ans! so take pity on me and tell your little yarn."

"Moose!"

Caleb gave an incredulous snort.

"You're joking. Since when has a moose been seen in these regions? At one time I suppose such animals could be found up here as well as in Maine and Canada, but not for ages. Sure you didn't see some mountain squatter's cow?"

Anson laughed good-naturedly, for it was hard work to get him out of temper.

"If I did I must have imagined a pair of horns that stood up like mountains on his head. He rushed from a thicket like a whirlwind, and I even had to jump to get out of his way. The snow isn't deep yet, and he could go to beat anything. I threw up my gun to fire, but remembering that buckshot would never kill him when he was running away, and not wanting to wound, I held my hand. Perhaps it was a little bit of caution that worked on me, too, for I've always heard that a wounded moose is

a terrible foe. Anyhow, he went in peace, with a clattering of hoofs and a whirl of snow."

"Well, that was an experience. Think the old chap is alone, and that he means to winter in the valley?" asked Caleb, now convinced that what his chum said was positive truth.

"Why not? He couldn't find a better place. Moose don't generally roam around about by themselves in the winter time. Even the bulls seem to be at peace with each other, keeping their battles for the mating season in spring; and a bunch of them will get together, make a 'yard' by tramping down the snow at some place where they can browse on the moss underneath, and the twigs above, where they will remain until spring comes. I never saw such a place, but I've read about them. Well, I couldn't take my oath on it, but it seemed to me that when this big bull got some distance away he was joined by other dark brown animals, possibly his family. If that is the case we may find their 'yard' later on when the snow gets two feet deep, and have a meat market to go to when our supplies get low. Wouldn't that be delightful, now?"

"For us, yes, for the moose, well, hardly. But that is the law of nature, the survival of the fittest; and if we have a chance to get some moose meat, I for one will make no serious ob-

jections. And a mighty pair of horns would just about fill the bill with you, eh, Ans?" remarked Caleb.

Thus it will be seen that whenever Anson went out these days he had a dim suspicion he might run across big game during the day; and this prospect lent a new charm of uncertainty to the labor of tramping over the hills through the snow.

It might be he would come in after indulging in such great hopes with nothing to show for his long and wearisome jaunt; or else a brace of partridges that had been so unfortunate as to get within range of his hard-hitting Marlin.

On the whole, though, it was very seldom Anson returned empty handed, for he had the true hunter instint, and knew just where to look for the quarry.

Many days went by after his unexpected meeting with the moose, and he did not have another glimpse of the great monarch of the North woods; but all the same he never lost faith in his conviction that sooner or later he was bound to meet up with the giant and try conclusions with him.

The snow deepened.

It was now knee deep on the level, and Caleb found much difficulty in making the round of his traps.

He had shortened the string considerably, taking up all that seemed to bring in no luck, and thus lightening his labors somewhat; though even then he had a long tramp to make each third day, and when he arrived home it was in a state of complete exhaustion.

There were no more otter, for the present at least, but he hoped to add to his list in the spring, when the little animals would again come out of their deep haunts and make slides on the steep banks.

The muskrats were still coming in, and he had a fine big bundle of furs that must represent quite a sum of money; and mink had not ceased to enter his traps, though, owing to the severe state of the weather he could not count on getting even one each day.

It finally came about that the boys were compelled to adapt themselves to the novelty of walking on snowshoes, for the drifts were so bad that sometimes it seemed impossible to get through them.

Snowshoeing is fine work when the conditions are just right, and that is when fellows who walk for pleasure take their outings; but if one has to go out, no matter what the conditions, it often proves hard sledding, though possible when ordinary walking is out of the question.

When a slight thaw has taken place in the daytime, and the melting snow freezes with a crust on top—that is the ideal time for snowshoeing, since it is possible to skate over the surface of drift and level at a remarkably fast speed.

The boys soon came to understand the working principles of their new gear, and both declared after the first day's experience that they did not feel one-half so fatigued as when trying to get around by floundering in the soft snow.

Of course they had accidents, and sometimes a bit serious, as, for instance, on the occasion of Anson toppling over into a drift, where he went down head first, with his feet sticking out, always a precarious situation, very much after that of the silly who tied a life preserver to his feet and then jumped overboard.

It took Anson a good half hour to get righted and taught him a lesson that he was not likely to forget, since he might have lost his life there in the lonely woods, far from camp.

January was creeping along and all seemed well.

Half of their stay in the wilderness had been accomplished, and as they surveyed the results of their campaign both boys enthusiastically voted it a huge success, both from a financial

standpoint and with regard to added health; for Anson declared he felt that he had taken on a new lease of life and would not entertain any future worry over the state of his lungs.

What more could they ask?

They had learned a thousand things in connection with the denizens of the wilds that they would never have known only for this scheme of getting close to Nature; and thus far not the slightest reason for regrets had cropped up.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COMING OF THE CANADIAN COUSINS.

By this time Anson had learned so many things in connection with the ways of the wilderness that he might be set down as a pretty fair woodsman; and yet, as he frankly admitted to Caleb, there was never a day passed but that he found something new to investigate and from which he could pick up novel experiences. He liked to surprise his companion in various ways—now it was some new and tempting dish which he prepared while Caleb was off on his rounds in the morning, gathering up what pelts fortune had thrown in his way during the preceding day; and on another occasion Anson was able to bring in some species of game that set his comrade to wondering whether there could be any limit to the variety of wild animals haunting the Happy Valley.

There was one particular instance where Anson found himself rather surprised, and it came about in this way:

A mile or so below the cabin the creek entered a broad stretch where quite a natural lake had formed, and in some way Anson learned that this body of water had finny

denizens in the shape of big pickerel—possibly some few words in the log of Uncle Abner gave him the clue; and being an ardent fisherman he longed for an opportunity to come whereby he might make a change in their regular diet of venison or bear meat, and provide some sweet fish for the table.

Another discovery that he made gave him a brilliant idea. In his wanderings he had come across what seemed little short of a phenomenon, for this country at least, in the shape of a little though rather deep pool that, despite the bitter cold of the air, refused to freeze over—if a skin of ice came upon it at times it melted away as if by magic later, and after studying the marvel for some time Anson came to the conclusion that it must be a sort of warm geyser, a miniature of those he had once seen in Yellowstone Park.

The water did not seem warm, and yet it was barely cold, and let the wintry wind howl as it would its influence was not equal to shutting that pool up in an icy mantle.

And then Anson also noticed that a certain species of minnow seemed to frequent this wonderful pool, as though acquainted with its properties as an insurance against the grip of winter, for he could see them swimming about lazily as if endeavoring to keep themselves

from the torpor that holds so many of their class during the reign of the season of cold.

The idea of putting the two things together burst upon him one night when he was sitting beside the fire whittling some soft pine wood with the idea of making more stretching boards, as Caleb reported the stock getting low, since the pelts had to remain a certain length of time upon them before being packed away.

A great light broke upon Anson, and he really believed that Uncle Abner had referred to this warm spring when he casually mentioned fish in the dead of winter, and not "cooked codfish" as Caleb imagined—he must have utilized some of these minnows to obtain a supply of the pickerel from the lake!

The idea thrilled him with satisfaction, for it happened that he had a little book with him that gave illustrations of various types of tip-ups for pickerel fishing through the ice as practiced in New York State and in New England. What was to hinder him making a try, and if successful surprising his pal with a fine fish dinner some night?

The very next day he started to work while Caleb was absent, and manufactured half a dozen of the simple little contrivances whereby warning may be received by the fisherman

when he has caught a hungry pickerel on one of the many lines he has set through holes out in the ice.

Sometimes this is in the form of a little white or red flag that is pulled to the top of a set stake when the fish is caught; again it may be a three-pronged crotch cut from a sapling, which is too wide in its reach to be drawn through the hole, but upon being dragged over by the fish elevates some manner of signal to give warning that a catch has been made; still another method is a simple contrivance shaped from two pieces of smooth wood in the shape of the letter T, with the line so adjusted that the fish by his vigorous pull throws the base of the frame upward, the bar preventing its being carried into the hole.

In all of these the one cardinal principle seems to be to allow the energetic fisherman to run from one hole to another as he is signalled that he has caught something worth while; and to rebait any hooks from which the quivering pirate of fresh water has stolen the minnow without feeling the prick of the hook.

On the following day, as soon as Caleb had departed the other prepared for his rather peculiar errand, feeling that thrill of expectancy that is always half of the game when starting on a hunt or a fishing expedition;

many times it fails to meet with the reward anticipated, but if the spirit be there, such misses do not diminish the ardor of the true sportsman.

Of course he took his gun along, although doubtful about doing it, and only for the solemn promise he had made to Caleb never to go without it, the chances were he might have for once left it behind—and as subsequent events proved, this might have led to a rather humiliating state of affairs.

They had a collapsible bucket, which Anson meant to carry in order to get some of the minnows to the lake alive; for it is essential that the bait swim in order to bring success in this sort of fishing.

First of all he built a fire on the shore of the little body of water, since he must keep the minnows from freezing after he got them; then he went off to the wonderful spring that refused to freeze over like its fellows, and with a small seine he had made out of an odd piece of netting that chanced to be in the camp duffle, Caleb's father having once used it for a head-net when the mosquitoes were bad in camp, he scooped up a dozen of the minnows with one effort.

Placing them in the bucket with some of the water from the spring he made a quick run to

the lake and arranged the receptacle between two little fires so that it could not feel the effect of the keen air.

Then he went out upon the ice and selecting several spots that in his mind promised to be most likely to harbor the quarry he was after, he set to work with the camp ax to cut holes.

This he found to be quite a labor, and by the time he had three done he was ready to call it off for a while in order to rest his muscles.

To amuse himself he baited three lines and set them in these holes, after which he started to cut a fourth.

Before he had made five strokes with the ax, happening to glance toward those already prepared, he was astonished to see that two of the little crotches were already on end and wriggling violently, the bit of red bunting standing up in plain sight as a token of a catch.

When through the first hole he pulled a pound pickerel, Anson let out a whoop of delight, and his joy was considerably augmented when he captured an even larger fish from the second aperture.

There was evidently going to be no need of a further supply of holes, for if the gamey fish continued to bite in this ferocious fashion

three lines would be apt to be all he could attend, what with the running to and fro for minnows and the difficulty of getting them to the pot without freezing.

The fun waxed fast and furious for a time, and Anson believed he was having the best sport of his life, as he saw quite a pile of fish accumulating.

Then, the biting falling off temporarily, as the hour for feeding passed, and noting that his catch was beginning to freeze in the air, he started in and put the whole lot on a couple of stout cords, just as he had done in earlier days when fishing in the village pond for sunnies; and when the job was completed, for some reason or other which he never could explain, he swung each string of fish up over the limb of a tree that chanced to be near the edge of the lake.

Caleb had announced his intention of going further than usual on this day, in order to investigate a bit of new territory and learn whether it would pay him to plant a few of his idle traps in that quarter; so that he had warned his pard that he might not be back short of evening; thus Anson knew he had the whole day before him, and while noon was drawing on he did not mean to give over his fishing—if he did take many times more than

they could eat at a sitting, the fish, being frozen stiff, would keep indefinitely; and perhaps the conditions of the weather later on might preclude the possibility of securing a further supply.

So he meant to put in the day at it, for there was little danger of the minnows giving out; and his ambition to give Caleb an agreeable shock kept getting stronger.

Anticipating something of the kind he had put up a snack for a lunch; and when there chanced to be a second lull in the biting of the pickerel he concluded that he might as well dispose of this between spells.

So the time wore on, and the middle of the afternoon found him ready to bring his day's sport to a close, since he really had all the fish he could carry to the cabin—indeed, he considered it was the part of wisdom to drop one of the strings into a hole in the ice and secure the cord above—the water would soon freeze and keep any animal from securing his catch during the night.

It was just at this particular moment that Anson, about to reach for the second string of fish, heard a peculiar sound that made him suddenly pause and look around.

If he had been near a settlement he should have believed that some stray dog had sud-

denly appeared upon the scene and was growling at him; indeed, as his astonished eyes fell upon the animal on the border of the little lake his first thought was that he was looking upon some Indian's shaggy dog, although it was a dirty gray instead of the customary yellow of those curs.

The beast again uttered a savage sound and curled back its lips, disclosing a very white set of teeth that looked as though they could do serious business if they ever got to work.

And then it flashed upon Anson that he was face to face with a wolf, one of those that sometimes wander down from the Canadian border into the Adirondacks during the winter, in search of game.

He had never set eyes on a wolf outside of a menagerie, but once the idea came into his mind he knew he could not be mistaken.

The fellow looked ugly enough to give trouble; although Caleb had told him it was almost unknown for a single wolf to attack a man, as they are naturally cowardly animals, and only fierce when hunting in packs; but then was it not at least possible, if not probable, that this fellow had comrades close by, whom he might call with a signal yelp?

Anson dropped back out of the crotch of the tree where he had been standing, as he

reached for the second string of fish, and at the same time the wolf uttered a strange cry, unlike anything he had ever listened to.

When he heard it echoed from some point but a short distance away the blood of the young fellow seemed to chill in his veins; but, obeying an involuntary inspiration, he gave a whoop himself, swung his arms violently above his head and started to jump toward the wolf.

But it was not Anson's intention to try conclusions barehanded with the fierce looking creature—his rifle lay on the edge of the bank not ten feet away from the intruder, and it had flashed upon him that unless he could get his hands upon the little Marlin before the rest of the pack arrived, he would be placed in a pretty serious predicament.

The wolf retreated before his advance, but evidently loth to give up the anticipated feast, for after going a few paces he would half turn and growl in an ugly manner, at the same time drawing back his short lips to expose his terrible fangs.

But Anson had his mind made up, and he was bound to get that gun in his possession, no matter how many perils faced him; and when he snatched it up eagerly how delighted he felt—the very touch of the beauty seemed like

the grip of a friendly hand, and a new confidence awoke in his bosom.

Now let the short-haired rascals come on if they wanted war; he would give them all the fighting they could masticate, and perhaps more than they might appreciate.

Already through the scrub he could see several forms advancing with top-notch speed, and it needed no necromancy to tell him these were the companion hunters of the wolf that still faced him, not forty feet away, and only waiting for the arrival of the others to begin the attack.

Apparently he could not start operations any too soon, if he had hopes of keeping these marauders at bay.

Anson was surprised to note how coolly he took matters, after getting his repeating rifle in his hands; it seemed to give him absolute confidence, in that he knew what it was able to accomplish if properly directed—since a man is apt to stake his very life upon the reliability of his weapon in hunting big game it is little wonder that those who have had long experience in this line are very particular as to the character of the gun they carry into the wilds; and Anson's choice had thus far proved to be a happy one.

He even felt a little sorry for Mr. Wolf, as

his eye ranged along the barrel of the repeater —it was hard that he should come to the end of his rope while pursuing the legitimate calling for which Nature had endowed him, and endeavoring to supply the cravings of his empty stomach; but it has ever been so when the denizens of the wilds come in conflict with man.

Just as Anson's ready finger pressed the trigger he saw the other animals rush out of the brush, and the sight must have disconcerted him a trifle, they looked so fierce and awe-inspiring, five of them all told—at any rate that was the excuse he gave for not killing the first chap instantly, as he certainly expected to do, having such a fair shot at him as he stood there with legs outstretched and apparently ready to join his comrades in a swoop forward.

The animal went down, it is true, but immediately scrambled to its feet, uttering quick yelps of pain and fury; Anson saw that he had only broken one of its hind legs, and as the other wolves swept past in their forward rush this undaunted beast, keen with hunger, and not wishing to be left entirely out of the anticipated feast, dragged himself along in a rather pitiable manner, continuing to give tongue after his kind.

But our young Nimrod had no time to note

what became of this chap, since his attention must now be wholly taken up with the balance of the pack, bearing down upon him with great rapidity, and ready to rend him with their sharp fangs.

The little rifle swung back to his shoulder—indeed, he had found no need to really remove it while sending the exploded shell from the chamber and rattling another charge from the magazine; and this time when the report sounded the bullet went home, for the leading wolf dropped in his tracks as though suddenly met by a bolt of lightning.

So far, good, but the end was not yet by considerable; the balance of the pack may have been surprised by the detonation that followed the pointing of a stick by this being on two legs, as well as the strange fall of their comrade; but as they were still four in number, and that gave them confidence, they hardly abated the fury of their forward rush one iota.

Another shot sounded, almost before the echo of the second had ceased among the aisles of the forest, and, true to his aim, the bullet bowled yet a third of the ravenous monsters over; why, it reminded Anson of some rattling games of ten pins in which he had played at various times, so absolute was the fall of the stricken animals.

Now there were but three in the line-up, and possible the consciousness that some mysterious agency against which they were powerless to hold their own was opposed to them began to influence the remainder of the pack—true, they still came forward, but their pace was noticeably diminished, and it could be seen from their manner of casting quick looks over their shoulders that they had begun to lose heart.

They were now not more than ten paces away from the young woodsman when he again looked along that shining barrel of Old Faithful, as he must ever after call the little gun that never failed him.

The pace of the wolves slowed up, and then they came to a halt, forming a half circle around the boy with the gun; in the pinch their bravery had failed them, doubtless mostly on account of the strange fate that had overtaken their fellows lying back there on the snow.

It was a picture for an artist, Anson standing on the edge of the pond with the trio of fierce wolves facing him, their legs spread out, their tongues lolling from between their cruel fangs, and the three pairs of red eyes glued eagerly on the object of their mingled hatred, fear and longing.

But Anson was taking no chances; besides, he had an idea his chum would be more or less

delighted with a bunch of wolfskins to add to his growing pile of pelts; and if so be these fellows chose to linger in the danger zone he felt that it was his bounden duty to oblige them with the best he had—they had hankered after his fish, or perhaps it was himself that had appealed to their cannibal instincts, but he was grimly determined they should get neither.

So he deliberately knocked over still another of the gray terrors of the pines; and, if you please, he even selected the exact spot where to place his lead so as to do just as little damage to the hide as possible—that was possibly mercenary, but it was done in a good cause, and not selfishly.

Well, that ended the whole matinee.

The two remaining wolves seemed to cast one look of horror over the battlefield, and then, turning tail "scooted," as Anson was wont to say, "for all they were worth." He had to laugh so heartily at their evidence of sudden terror that, although he aimed his gun once or twice he did not dare pull trigger, knowing there was not a chance in ten of his doing any damage with the game in full flight, and himself shaking with merriment.

Just then something drew his attention to a quarter almost in his rear, and, turning quickly he was in time to see the first animal

which he had wounded stagger to its feet—evidently it had attempted, with wolfish cunning, to "surround" the enemy while its comrades made a frontal attack, and had fallen over the edge of the little bank on to the ice.

Scrambling erect, it again started toward him, dragging its broken leg painfully along, and with the fires of rage burning in its blazing eyes; Anson shuddered, for he had never seen a more terrible picture of animal passion; but he knew there was only one course for him to pursue, and that the beast must be put out of his suffering immediately.

This he did without waste of time, and it only required one shot to complete the business, although the stubborn brute died hard, gnashing his teeth, and even trying to drag his body in the direction of his enemy.

Anson never forgot that experience, for showed him the unquenchable spirit of a beast rendered desperate by pain.

He stopped to get his breath, and then with fingers that trembled, for all his apparent indifference, rammed some fresh fuel into the partly emptied magazine of his gun; if there was one pack of Canada wolves at large in the big North woods, who was to say there might not be more?

And yet during the balance of their stay

the boys never had the luck, good or bad, to see another of the beasts.

Anson surveyed the field of battle with pardonable emotions bordering on pride; for it was not every tenderfoot who could look upon a quartette of savage wolves falling before his gun on his first winter out.

He knew he could never get the skins off in time to reach the shack and prepare some of the fish for supper; so, as the next best thing, he let them lie; Caleb, he felt positive, would never sleep until he had come to the pond and removed the hides of the fallen animals.

So, holding his gun in readiness for immediate use, should those remaining pair of gray pilgrims spring out at him on the way, and with the heavy string of pickerel dragging in the snow after him, he took up his line of march in the direction of home.

There was no waylaying on the part of the sad remnant of that once ferocious pack; and the chances seemed to be that the two wolves were already miles away, perhaps heading out of this very inhospitable region with all speed.

Arrived at the cabin Anson hastened to prepare a sufficient quantity of the catch to supply all demands of appetite; and long ere the shades of evening dropped down upon the scene there was a fragrant odor about the camp

that caused the returning and weary young trapper to emit a shout of incredulity as he stood in the doorway and surveyed the scene.

They enjoyed that treat greatly, even though the meal did have to be lengthened to nearly twice the ordinary time, on account of the many "pitchfork" bones that make pickerel so difficult to eat; but aside from this tedious obstruction the meal was voted a great success, and they looked forward with considerable pleasure to more of the same order.

And as yet Anson had not whispered one word about his battle with the wolves, reserving this story until they had disposed of the fish dinner—he always declared that he was afraid he would get Caleb so excited that he would either lose his appetite or choke over some of the shad-like bones.

But the other seemed to guess there was something coming; perhaps he could read the eager look on his friend's face—at any rate, after they had finished their meal, and Anson had lighted his pipe for a comfortable smoke, Caleb smiled in his face, and quietly remarked:

"Now, tell me all about it, Ans—you've got something up your sleeve, my boy, and I want to know, if I'm not from Missouri. What happened?"

"It's pretty hard to keep a secret from your

sharp eyes, old man. Say, do you feel like taking another little tramp after your hard day's work—over to the pond, in fact? You brought in three measly little pelts, and I think I can match you and still go one better. How about it?" the other demanded.

"Well, if you think it's worth while, I could go to the pond about three times before owning up to being dead beat. Now, what have you found there—a muskrat colony, and been shooting the poor little brutes ruining the skins, perhaps? No, I see you shake your head; well, then, it couldn't have been mink or otter, could it? You have got me guessing good and hard, I admit," and Caleb knit his brows while observing his smiling chum seriously.

"You couldn't guess in a week of Sundays. The fact of the matter is my possession of those two strings of fish was disputed by some fine fellows whose empty stomachs clamored to be filled. In a word, wolves!"

Caleb bounded to his feet in excitement.

"Jerusalem! You don't mean it; and you say you got four of the critters, Ans? I knuckle down to you as the champion Nimrod; why I ain't in the same class with you, old fellow. Four wolves, and at this time of year they are said to be fierce enough to tackle any-

thing. For goodness sake tell me all about it; don't you see that I'm fairly trembling with eagerness. Pitch in, now," cried the other.

"I guess they wouldn't have minded making a dinner off me if they had been given the chance; but this little pet worked too smoothly for the bully boys," and Anson fondled his Marlin fondly as he spoke—so does a gun work into the affections of the one who learns to stake his all upon its faithfulness.

The story was soon told, and, of course, Caleb asked a multitude of eager questions immediately after, wishing to learn the entire facts.

He had apparently quite forgotten that he had covered many miles that day on his snow shoes, and when he struck camp was dead tired, for these little surprises which his pard had set up for him caused him to recuperate in a marvelous manner.

So it was he presently announced he was ready to proceed to the pond and enter upon the task of removing the skins of the four wolves; when Anson protested against such unseemly haste, thinking of the other's long day, Caleb declared that he was afraid lest some animal come upon the battlefield, drawn by the scent of freshly spilled blood, and at

least mutilate the hides before he could find a chance to take them off.

So, taking the lantern, and their guns, of a surety, the two walked over the plain trail Anson had left, arriving at the little lake in good time; they did have a glimpse of some animal slinking off as they approached, but were unable to say whether it could be one of the remaining wolves or some other beast until by using the lantern upon the tracks Caleb observed that it was only a wildcat.

He immediately got down to work, and being something of an expert by this time in the art of removing the coats of all animals after the most approved fashion, recommended by the big fur dealing houses of the country, it was not long before the entire quartette of wolves had been denuded of their coats—two were in a magnificent state of preservation, a third fairly so, while the skin of the chap whom Anson had to shoot twice was more or less mutilated; still, it would make a good rug, and serve as a reminder to the young Nimrod of his adventure on the border of the pickerel pond.

It was thought just as well while they were about it to secure the second string of fish; for some of these prowling animals were unusually clever, and Caleb said he would not put it

past them to drag up the line and gobble every pickerel in sight; so that both of them had just about as much as they wanted to carry when returning over the trail to camp.

And Anson marked that day down with a red line in his diary of the remarkable episodes that were coming his way during this winter in the woods; long would he remember the picture those wolves at bay presented as they stood there facing him and hesitating whether to attack or turn tail in flight.

CHAPTER XII.

A WELCOME VISITOR.

One thing Anson had fully learned through this adventure, and this was the absolute necessity of always keeping himself in condition to meet an emergency; for no matter how smiling the skies might appear, trouble was apt to drop in to sup with either of them in the most unexpected manner.

He realized that the man who is prepared is doubly armed; and it sometimes gave him a qualm to try and imagine what might have happened had he yielded to that impulse which tempted him to leave his gun at the cabin when starting out after pickerel.

Perhaps a tragedy might not have followed, for at the worst he could have doubtless managed to swarm into the tree; but then the humiliation of being found thus by his chum would be far from pleasant, to say nothing of his losing the opportunity to bag four ferocious wolves and present their pelts to the admiring Caleb.

The day after the one that marked his little fracas with the gray visitors from the North quite a furious storm broke over the woods and threatened to tie up their operations for some

little time, since these snows frequently drift to a depth of many feet, and it is next to impossible to get around.

They had a welcome surprise, too, for with the storm beginning late in the afternoon, a knock was heard at the cabin door, and upon the wondering Anson opening the same he was delighted to see an old Indian named John Sebattis stride in, bearing on his good shoulder a saddle of fine venison, while he managed to carry his long-barreled rifle with the bandaged arm.

During one of his side hunts Anson had come upon the old native guide, suffering from an accidental gunshot wound. He had deftly bound up the hurt in the most approved fashion and gone part way up the valley in the direction of Sebattis' cabin, where he had a squaw and several children.

The grateful old Indian, who had drifted here from Maine years back, had promised to drop in on them some day later on, and sure enough here he was, hale and hearty.

Quickly did Anson relieve him of his load and grasp his hand with enthusiasm; while the black eyes of the Indian glittered with pleasure at once more meeting the lad whose ability as a surgeon had filled him with reverence.

They made him doubly welcome, and indeed were actually glad that the storm must cause John to prolong his stay; for both of them knew they could learn much that was of value from this experienced guide, whose whole life had been spent in a heart-to-heart communion with Nature and her many secrets.

John was greatly pleased to find himself under the shelter of the roof that had for so many years shielded Uncle Abner from the storms of winter; and he handled some of the things that had belonged to the old trapper with silent delight.

His arm was coming on famously—indeed, he could almost say it was nearly well, and much of the praise for this rapid recovery he was ready to lay at the door of Anson, who had handled the case with so much ability.

It was seldom old John gave praise, and his burning words caused the lad to fairly blush with confusion, while Caleb laughed with delight.

Three days did old John stay with them, for they would not hear of his quitting sooner; indeed, on the third one of his sons appeared, those in the village having felt more or less anxiety about the veteran, seeing that he was getting along in years, and had only one arm

at present fit for service; but somehow John did not take kindly to the solicitude shown and seemed to feel that it was a reflection upon his ability to still look after himself, just as though they looked upon him as becoming a past number.

His pride in his ability to hold up his end of the row with the best was a dominant trait in his character, and would doubtless have more or less effect in causing him to ward off the ravages of time—such men would welcome death in preference to the state of a superannuated lion, wandering, toothless and starving in the woods, unable to pull down his prey, and an object of pity or contempt to every other animal.

And during this time it may be readily understood that the two young trappers picked up a wonderful fund of information in connection with the habits of the denizens of the wilderness, as gleaned by old John at first hands, direct from the fountain of knowledge in the home of the fur-bearers themselves.

It seemed as though he knew the very thoughts of these little creatures, to hear him tell how they reasoned among themselves, constructed their nests or burrows so as to be safe against their enemies and the bitter wintry weather; Anson never wearied of hanging

upon his words, and kept the old man talking during his visit more than he had done for some years, no doubt.

But John was very fond of the lad and followed him with his eyes as Anson moved about the cabin preparing the evening meal—perhaps the old man had about given himself up for lost on that day of the accident, when the life fluid was running away so rapidly and the deadly weakness seemed about to overtake him; so that he really believed he owed his very life to the fortunate coming of Anson and the other's marvelous knowledge of surgery.

He also taught them several Indian methods of cookery; but while to Anson these dishes partook of the attraction that all novelties do, he secretly believed he much preferred the white cook's method of serving things, though not for worlds would he have said as much to old John, knowing how extremely sensitive he was.

The Indian had been particularly interested in the little warm spring in which it appeared minnows could live all through the winter; he declared he had never heard of such a wonder before, and Anson was inclined to believe the mind of the simple old Penobscot even looked upon the thing as uncanny

and bordering on the superstitious; for such men always put things they fail to understand in the class of the unnatural—old John would not touch one of the minnows, a fact that the boys viewed with secret amusement.

But he fondled the wolf pelts with keenest delight, and declared that it had been quite a few years since fortune had allowed him to shoot one of these animals, which, in his boyhood days, far up in Maine, had been very numerous and bold.

He had Anson relate the story more than once, and even walked over with him to view the scene of operations. It was evident that the old man felt his opinion of the budding surgeon had not been misplaced, for after that his sparkling black eyes expressed more admiration than ever as they watched Anson.

When he finally departed in company with Pierre, both bearing many good wishes from the young trappers, as well as more or less substantial evidences of friendship, he was sorely missed from their fireside, where he had proven such a welcome addition to the evening confab.

Of course, after the storm there was much to be done, since the difficulty of getting around had been increased, as well as extra

trouble in caring for what few traps Caleb still kept going in favored localities.

His spirit was just as unquenchable as ever, and he went at the task with all his customary vim; while Anson tended the camp and did all the chores, as well as brought down some occasional game with his rifle.

The moon was about full, and on those bitter wintry nights it was simply beautiful to see its soft radiance falling upon the snow covered trees of the great forest; to Anson the scene was like one from fairy-land, and he never wearied of looking at it, standing outside before retiring and drinking in his fill night after night.

Usually dead silence hung over the woods when the wind was still; but there were times when a good pair of ears could detect some far-off throbbing sound calculated to arouse curiosity. When Anson could not decide what the origin of these mysterious noises might be he called upon his friend, and Caleb, from his more extended experience was able to place each and every one.

It seemed to the city lad, however, that the mournful hoot of an owl beyond the ridge back of the cabin was exactly in sympathy with the weird picture; and he never recalled the mysterious snow forest as seen in the mel-

low glow of the queen of the night without fancying he could hear that quaint accompaniment.

At their fire of nights the two had talked of many things besides the present, and these covered their ambitions for the future; Anson had finally prevailed upon the other to promise to accept a loan from his abundant resources in order to help him through college when he made his start; for the money received from the winter's catch of furs could not be expected to carry him more than one season, and he would be debarred from trying anything of the same sort again.

On his part Caleb was decidedly interested in all the plans and hopes of his chum, and readily voiced the prediction of old John, who had declared that the lad who knew so much of the science of surgery to start with, and was eager to make it his life work, could not fail to reach the pinnacle of success.

All these things are mentioned simply to give the reader an inkling as to the close intimacy existing between the twain; doubtless they might have been good friends under ordinary conditions, but it requires isolation of this type to make two kindred souls rely wholly upon one another and love the association.

And although money meant so little to Anson it was a genuine pleasure to notice how much interest he manifested in the tally his comrade kept with regard to the furs already obtained, and their possible value when taken to market. He figured things up just as eagerly as though much of his future depended upon their getting the top-notch price for every skin in the heap—say $9 for mink, $4 for raccoon, $26 for dark otter, $1 for each muskrat pelt, $8 for beaver, $18 for fisher, $25 for bear, $5 for wolf, $20 for marten, and $6 for wildcat.

Such prices seldom obtain and can usually be scaled down to half, though perfect specimens carefully cured and of the right color hold their own in the fur markets of the world; since there seems to be an increasing demand and a declining supply of all valuable pelts.

No matter, the gradually increasing pile was a source of much delight to Anson, who had possibly never before earned a dollar in his whole life. He seemed to take even more interest in the anticipated profits of the expedition than the one who was to reap the reward; but then Caleb was a quiet lad, not much given to expressing his feelings, and

might think more than appeared upon the surface; for still water runs deep, it is said.

One thing Caleb had done, and this was to spare some of the beaver.

He could easily have cleaned out the entire colony, and most trappers would certainly have done this same thing, not caring a particle about future generations; but the labors and cunning ways of the broadtails interested Caleb to such an extent that he drew the line when he had four pelts, and after that nothing would tempt him to molest the little busy fellows. Of course they kept in their houses during the bitter weather, but this made them easy prey, if so be he had wished to add to his stock of furs.

In return he learned many things from the hard working little chaps, especially later on when they came out of their winter quarters and courageously went to work to repair the ravages the long winter had made upon their dam.

Caleb found it a good thing to use the fish-heads as bait, and there was a marked increase in his catch when he began to tempt the appetites of the fur-bearing residents of the neighborhood of the creek with these dainties.

On the whole that foray of Anson's promised to be one of the most profitable of the entire season; and he secretly promised himself to repeat the feat just as soon as they had disposed of the last pickerel.

The question of a wood supply occupied a goodly portion of Anson's time, for they used a vast quantity of fuel in the effort to keep comfortable; but Caleb let him do the chopping because he knew it was the finest exercise in the world for a lad whose lungs had begun to give him serious consideration—expanding the chest and forcing him to take in great breaths that could only serve to further enlarge his respiratory organs.

Never a whisper from Anson—indeed, he many times told himself that he was the luckiest boy alive to be given the privilege of camping a whole winter in the company of so fine a fellow as Caleb Cushing; and he performed the most arduous tasks with a light heart and humming fragments of popular airs that told of a perfect freedom from care.

Half the winter gone, and everything coming their way—if things only kept on as they had started it would be a signal success, this campaign in the wilderness, and something both of them could look back to with the live-

liest satisfaction in years to come, when perhaps wrestling with the more serious problems that were sure to face them out in the world of professional and business affairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WILDCAT ON HIS SHOULDERS.

It required more skill and cunning than ever to take furs, now that the heart of winter had come, and nearly everything was frozen stiff.

Caleb had studied up on this problem, and imbibed all the knowledge he could from every conceivable source; but he admitted that the simple directions given in that quaint compendium of trapping lore compounded by Uncle Abner filled the bill better than anything else.

When he wrote these directions the old man was on the ground, in close touch with the very animals that engaged his attention, while many of those who publish books on the subject do their writing in steam-heated flats in the city, and compile most of their apparent knowledge from various "guides," and other sources of information, often of a questionable nature.

And the deeper Caleb dipped into this lore of the woods the more fascinating he found it; nor did he wonder that men are contented to forsake the haunts of their fellows, where so much duplicity abounds, and lodge in the heart of the wilderness, where things are just what they seem.

Still, there was no temptation for him to at-

tempt anything along this line; such a life might answer for a man who had wearied of the battle with fortune, and trying to hold up his end in an unequal fight; but to a lad with a burning desire to accomplish something worth while in the world it would never do—he eagerly awaited the day when he could push out from the shore, and, taking his courage in both hands, pit his talents, such as they were, against those of his fellows, and possibly win at least a fair share of the world's homage.

The muskrats kept moving most of the time, so that by exercising considerable shrewdness Caleb was able to take constant toll of the little rodents; and though they were among the most humble of his catch, from a monetary point of view, they really afforded him a vast field for study and endeavor. When he came upon some old chap who seemed unusually keen and hard to trap it aroused his ambition, and he would not give over until he accomplished his end, and the veteran's pelt had been added to the pile.

Caleb about this time had a very disagreeable time with a wildcat that must have been exceedingly hungry, or else of a most pugnacious disposition.

He bore the marks of the brute's claws for

some time, too, and felt grateful to know his eyes had escaped the clawing.

The attack was entirely unprovoked, which made it appear all the more singular, for it is not often that one of these animals will waylay a human being, especially when he is carrying a lantern at the time.

It happened in this way:

One evening Caleb remarked that he had forgotten to visit a trap he had placed part way to the swamp, in the hope of nabbing a fox who seemed to delight in passing along that route; something had called his attention to another quarter, and he really quite forgot this particular trap until entering camp.

At first he had decided to let it go until the morning; but it would appear that the idea gave him more or less anxiety; a fox might have become caught between the jaws of the steel trap, and if left beyond a certain time would gnaw his foot off in the endeavor to escape—this, of course, after he had mangled it more or less in striving to pull away.

It was against the principles of the young trapper to have such a thing as this occur, for not only did it entail future suffering on the poor animal, but diminished the value of the pelt when Reynard was eventually brought to book; so that his companion was not at all sur-

prised when he saw Caleb fight the lantern and announce that he intended stepping out a bit, to take a look at that fox set.

Anson was head over ears in some particular business, but even then he quickly offered to accompany his chum, only the other refused to hear of it, and slinging his rifle over his shoulder, with the lantern dangling in the other hand, strode away on his snow shoes.

Somehow Anson looked rather dubiously after him, as if he had an intuition the other might meet with some sort of an adventure; he followed the gleam of the lantern as long as it was in sight, and then resumed his task, though occasionally he would raise his head to listen.

Half an hour later he caught the plain, unmistakable report of Caleb's rifle at some point in the distance; and judged that it must be close to the trap he had gone to examine.

Although there was really nothing very singular about this shot, somehow it seemed to worry Anson, for presently he threw down the new paddle he was making for his canoe, having cracked the old one by accident when stepping upon it, and taking his rifle, he strode out of the cabin.

The night was very dark; that is, when the snow surrounding their camp was taken into

consideration; the overhanging trees adding to the gloom.

Anson listened carefully, but could not hear the first sound from any quarter—just that one shot, and then all was still; but as that had been at quite some distance there might have been all sorts of accompaniments without his knowing anything about the fact.

He shook his head and, seized with a sudden determination, began to fasten on his own snow shoes, with which he had become quite expert by this time.

Perhaps it was foolish, starting out in the dark night to look for his chum, who had a lantern with him all the while; but he could not stay quietly in camp and suffer any longer from that feeling of uneasiness.

He meant to shout when he had passd a certain distance from the camp, and hoped to hear the voice of Caleb answering that all was well, and that he had only fired to mercifully kill some varmint whose ferociousness prevented him from getting close enough to knock him on the head.

Before Anson had gone fifty yards he was pleased to see a moving light glimmering among the trees, which he knew could be nothing less than his comrade returning safe and sound, he hoped.

He waited for Caleb to come up, and called to him as he drew near, receiving a reassuring answer; but when the other joined him he discovered that he was loaded with some manner of game, and naturally his eyes expressed more than a little wonder as he discovered the nature of the bunch—one beautiful gray fox and a most ferocious wildcat.

And then he saw that Caleb was wiping the blood off his cheek, showing that he had been wounded; so he took up the game and hurried his friend back home, where he could apply permanganate of potash of such strength that it caused Caleb to declare the remedy was worse than the disease, it hurt so; but he had perfect confidence in the young surgeon, and knew that there is always more or less danger to be feared from wounds made by the tainted claws of all animals apt to come in contact with carrion, such as grizzlies, tigers, hyenas, panthers and wildcats.

Anson had made sure to have a liberal supply of this most useful remedy along in his little medicine chest ere starting out upon his campaign in the wilds; and already had he found it a most excellent preventive against trouble.

When they were comfortably settled alongside the fire, and Caleb was enjoying a late cup

of warmed-over coffee, he told his story, which was not so much after all, though it had given him considerable of a jolt, the surprise had been so great.

It seemed that he had reached the spot where his fox trap had been shrewdly set, to find that Mr. Reynard had put his foot in it, and was even then endeavoring to twist that useful member off in the hope of living to see other days.

Of course Caleb put an end to his ambition without delay; and it only took a good tap on the head to end up his slick career—after that the young partridges might roost low for all this particular fox would do them injury.

Not wishing to take off the pelt at that time of night, and as the animal could be readily carried, Caleb had presently started for home, after setting the trap again, in the faint hope that there might be a second rash brother of the bushy tail who would be coming that way and fail to realize his peril until a snap and a sudden thrill announced the fact that he was caught.

In returning Caleb swung a little out from his direct line, for some reason or other which he did not think it worth while to explain, it was so trivial.

This maneuver took him over new ground, as

it were, and possibly brought about the strange adventure that befel him.

He declared he had not the faintest suspicion that a pair of yellow eyes had been watching his every move, and the first intimation he had of danger was when the wildcat came down plump upon his shoulders, at the same time uttering a screech that sounded like the blast of a locomotive whistle in his ears, but which had certainly never been heard by Anson, not over half a mile away.

Of course he knew instantly what had attacked him, and while tremendously surprised he mechanically threw up both his arms to dislodge the beast, and possibly at the same time defend his eyes from its claws.

They ripped the stout sleeve of his hunting coat to ribbons, left their mark on his arm, and even gouged his cheek in passing—all in the space of a second, Caleb vowed; for the astonishing whirling motion that he made had the effect of throwing the ferocious beast from his perch to the ground.

It jumped at him instantly, all aflame for combat, and only a well directed kick from one of Caleb's ready feet sent it flying backwards.

No sooner did the beast land again than it was flying forward to the attack in a manner

that would have given any man a momentary thrill; but brief though the time had been, Caleb, who was also like lightning in all his movements, had thrown his ready rifle forward and managed to meet the beast's charge with a poke that once more sent it to earth.

Nothing daunted by these reverses, the cat again sprang to the assault; but now a new element entered into the game, against which all his feline fierceness and agility were as naught; for the young trapper had pawed the hammer of his gun back, and from instinct, rather than any ability to take aim, sent a bullet into the body of the beast.

That closed the matter in a hurry, though Caleb found it policy to rap the dying brute over the head a few times with the butt of his gun, in order to end its sufferings.

It had been one of the quickest things ever coming his way, nor was he anxious to have the experience repeated; for there is nothing pleasant about feeling the talons of a bobcat tearing at your sleeve and hear its frenzied screech close up to your ear, especially when incumbered with game and a rifle that is of little use in such an emergency and at short range.

After thinking over the matter Caleb was of the opinion that the cat was only hungry, and

being of a fierce disposition, considered that it would be possible to make the two-legged beast drop the four-legged one, which could be dragged off for its own entertainment.

Granted that this were so, then Mr. Bobcat had made a mistake which he paid for with his life.

Thanks to the prompt measures taken by Anson, the scratches did not result in anything like blood poisoning; and altogether Caleb considered that he had gotten off quite easily, considering what might have followed; for one of these brutes when desperate is a bad subject to handle, as every hunter knows.

This was another pelt that was ruined so far as its marketable value went; but it could be noticed that Caleb took especial pains in curing the hide of his wildcat friend; and it might be expected that he would often recall his short, though furious, fight in the snow forest at night, when the starving beast endeavored to make him give up the grey prize he had taken in his fox trap; possibly the cat was just on the way to the trap, scenting game, when Caleb turned up, and under the circumstances may have considered that he had a just grievance against the other for removing what might have provided a dinner to the owner of the sleek coat.

The incident made such an impression upon the mind of Anson that after that whenever he chanced to go out of doors at night to admire the scenery he made it a point to pick up his handy gun, kept near the exit, for if a bobcat could be so bold as to attack his chum without the slightest provocation, what was to hinder a kindred spirit from pouncing on him at some time; and from the tracks he knew the animals often perambulated in the vicinity of the shack while the inmates slept, possibly attracted by some odor of camp cookery that must have appealed very strongly to the senses of a hungry, carnivorous prowler.

But Caleb's adventure was fated to stand as the sole example of wildcat depravity, and would serve to be the basis of one of the many startling stories their experience would furnish when they had emerged from the woods and once more entered the haunts of busy men.

Nevertheless, there were other things fated to befall them, and one at least as singular a happening as Caleb had ever heard of—indeed, when the account was given to old John that sagacious individual declared it beat all he had ever known in his many years of roaming the wilds; and consequently it may be set down as altogether unusual.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST BUTTS IN.

Caleb was possessed of a very pertinacious nature, and though he seldom mentioned the matter he never wholly relaxed his vigilance with regard to the expected coming of the panther.

Once Anson reported that he had heard a strange series of cries off in the thickest part of the woods where he was ranging, and suspecting that these might spring from his friend of the gray jacket, he declined to investigate, since, as he wisely remarked, he could not recall having lost any panther at that time. Later on he believed he also caught a loud purring sound, such as a big cat might make, and the idea that he was close to the hungry beast caused him to quicken his steps and keep his finger on the trigger of his gun, ready to pour in a volley at the first appearance of the prowler.

But nothing had followed, and he breathed easier when the woods grew more open, so that he could see some distance around him and be prepared for an attack.

Anson was drying some of their surplus venison, by hanging it in the wide-throated

chimney, where the fumes of the hard wood would carry out his idea, and give sweetness to the meat.

That was what brought about a strange adventure.

The night was not quite so cold as usual; but Caleb, chancing to awaken along about two or three o'clock was thinking of crawling out of his bunk and throwing some more fuel on the fire, which had died down to a few red coals, when, without the slightest warning, there was a furious scratching close by, followed by a loud screech, and a heavy thud.

"What's that?" shouted Anson starting to jump up.

"Get back into your bunk instantly!" cried Caleb, using one of his hands to push his chum over; "some sort of animal has come down the chimney!"

"Gracious! are you sure?" ejaculated the other, in abject amazement, for he had never heard of such a strange thing.

"I just had a glimpse of it scratching through the ashes yonder. You can see how they are scattered. And while the light is mighty dim, I fancy I can just discover some sort of object crouching over yonder at the door," returned Caleb.

The picture must have been a startling one,

with the two boys poking their heads out of their bunks, and Caleb pointing to the spot where he saw "something queer."

"Say, do you think your prophecy has come true, and it's that blessed old panther come to pay us a visit?" demanded Anson, with tense breath.

"Wouldn't wonder a bit. He was after that meat you hung in the chimney. So you see you're to blame, and not the trap I set outside a while back. Say, isn't your shotgun in this corner here by me?"

"Yes, as sure as you live, it is. For mercy's sake go slow and don't provoke him to attack you. I don't want to muss up my bunk by a bloody fight. Have you reached the gun, Cale?"

"I have it. Now try to remember, what have you got in the barrels?"

"Just as usual, shot in the right, buckshot in the left. I never alter that combination except when I put in both shells of buck. Depend on it that's right," said Anson, positively.

"Take your word for it. Now, you have matches in your pocket, for you never go without—reach around and get one. Tell me when you're ready, and I'll give the word to

strike. This has got to be a sure thing or there'll be trouble."

"Say, Cale, are your hands steady? If not, better let me try it," whispered Anson.

"Steady as a rock, never fear. You do your part and I'll promise mine. Listen, was that a growl?"

"Sure thing. The beast is getting over his fright at coming down into the fire, and his ugly temper is showing again. There, listen to him purr. That's a queer freak, now. Thought cats only purred when contented. Thinks he's got us in a tight hole, maybe. Now, old man, be sure. I've got my pistol gripped, but it's poor going against a beast like that at close quarters. Tell me when!"

Caleb had both hammers of the little twelve-bore Marlin raised, and as well as he could he settled down to take aim at the object up against the door.

"Are you ready?" he asked, his voice just as calm as if he stood before the traps, and with clay pigeons to soar to the right and left.

"Ready," answered Anson.

"Then pull!"

There was a scratching sound, and immediately the match burst into a flame.

What the two lads saw was not a very cheerful sight.

Down there on the floor by the door a large gray animal crouched, with a square head laid between his paws, and his tail switching to and fro with spasmodic jerks.

There was no time to see anything more, for Caleb had an instinctive idea that the panther, angered by its burns in falling into the hot embers of the fire, and believing these human beings were responsible for its suffering, was about to spring, since his glowing eyes were fastened upon the bunks, and his ears had flattened against his head in an aggressive manner.

Then Caleb pressed the trigger, and the bang of the gun sounded like a clap of thunder in the confined space of the cabin.

Anson had other matches in his hand, and he deliberately thrust several at once into the blaze of the one he had just struck, so that there was no lack of illumination.

The animal was blown completely over by the discharge at close quarters, and rolled about upon the floor in its death agonies, Caleb following each and every little movement with the shotgun, evidently quite ready to give him the right barrel the very second he showed any disposition to struggle to an upright posture.

A second dose was not needed, however, for

the buckshot had gone like a huge bullet, having no chance to separate at such short range, and the animal was giving his last kick when Anson jumped out upon the floor, lighted a candle, and then hustled some fine kindling upon the hearth, to which he applied a match.

The boys dressed in a hurry, for there could be no more sleep that night.

Both were shivering now, perhaps with the cold, but more than likely from the after-effect of the excitement; though neither had trembled at the time the danger seemed greatest.

Upon examining the panther they found that he was a big fellow, and with claws that made them shudder as they saw them; he had undoubtedly been attracted to the wide-throated chimney by the tantalizing odor of smoked bear meat and venison, and as he in his hunger endeavored to reach the same, he had fallen in, with the result of giving the two lads the scare of their lives.

Still, they thought they could afford to forgive the gray rascal, as they considered that they had the best of the bargain, since the poor old chap had paid the penalty for his rashness with his life.

"There's only one thing I regret," sighed Caleb, disconsolately, as he looked at the big

brute and stroked the soft fur with his hand.

"I can bet I know what it is—you're grieving now because you just had to go and spoil a fine skin to save our lives. George, you're the worst I ever knew. Anyhow, the pelt's all right, for you only struck him in the head," exclaimed Anson, with mock disgust.

"Yes, but it would have been much handsomer with the head intact. However, don't think I'm ungrateful, old chap, because I believe we've had the narrowest escape of our lives. If those poisonous claws had dug into our flesh you'd have had more use for that little phial of medicine you brought along, and which you said is used in India when a man is clawed by a tiger. Well, in the morning I'll have the pleasure of relieving our friend and guest of his nice coat, which I imagine he does not need any longer. It will add variety to my collection. Say, won't the eyes of those croakers in Tedbury, who predicted all sorts of dismal failures for our expedition, stick out when they see me unroll those precious old bundles of fur? If it keeps on I'll have enough for my college year, and perhaps a surplus to make mother a dandy fur coat in the bargain. She'll be proud to wear one that is made of skins her boy took from the wilds."

"I should say she would, and I'm to have

the pleasure of getting it made for her—don't say a word on that score now; it's settled for keeps. What time is it, anyway? Going back to bed?"

"We'd better, for it isn't three; but I can't sleep a wink I know."

They lay there talking until it was time to get up and start in on the many duties of the day.

Of course Caleb was proud of the panther pelt when it was dried and ready for packing; and he took especial pains to see that it kept soft and pliable, for some day he expected to have that same as a rug on the floor of his room at college, as he had heard of the other boys doing, only in their case money supplied the same, and not their own ability as nimrods.

Anson boasted some of the success of his panther trap, but it was noticed that he took the smoked meat out of the chimney that very next day, and when Caleb came to examine the flue later he found that there had been a nice stout bar placed in such a manner that no animal might after that get even his head into the opening above.

Evidently Anson did not hanker after a repetition of his experience; and surely he could not be blamed for such caution, for it

was a terrible thing to be so suddenly aroused from sound sleep and learn that a ferocious beast had entered through the chimney, and was even then crouching on the floor, growling with rage, and ready to spring upon the aroused sleepers.

No doubt Ans did the subject full justice in his memoirs of the trip, and gave his chum all the praise he deserved for his plucky shot.

They had brought books along with them, and at times when snow-bound found an opportunity to pore over these; they were not novels but books pertaining to things in which the boys were deeply interested, so that they were stocking their minds with information the while.

Both now found themselves looking forward with increasing interest to the wind-up of winter, and the breaking of spring, still a good way off.

No matter how pleasantly situated a couple may be when thus alone, there must come a time when something within them clamors for new scenes and contact with their fellows.

Caleb never faltered in his work.

He took his toll of the muskrat colonies in that swamp as though it might be the one main object of his life, as indeed it was just then, and never seemed to tire of preparing

the skins; and yet he knew that he would never be happy as a trapper, for there were larger and greater vocations calling to him from the outside world, and he must heed the summons—this was all very good as a means to an end, but with this one season his work as a curer of furs would likely come to its finis.

CHAPTER XV.

DEATH OF THE BULL MOOSE.

It was about the tenth of February when Anson came back one afternoon with great news that created quite a ripple in the camp, and caused Caleb to postpone the regular visit he meant to take among his traps the following day.

Anson had discovered the moose yard!

Without saying anything about it he had been for some time keenly on the lookout for this same thing, feeling full confidence that his friend the big bull moose had not left the valley entirely, for nowhere would he find better forage than here.

And finally the boy's searching was rewarded, when he heard certain sounds proceeding from a section of the forest where he had not visited in a long time; and suspecting what their significance might be he crawled up close, keeping the wind in front of him, and his reward had come when his startled eyes fell upon a group of four moose, stamping around a depression in the deep snow, which was piled all around like ramparts, giving the place the appearance of a veritable "yard."

"It looked just like a barnyard, with a lot

of mules stamping around, only that royal old bull, with his great, spreading horns beat the band. I'm after him tomorrow, you can bet, and I want you to go along to carry my gun; for, of course, I'll have to use your rifle on that monster," said Anson, in conclusion.

So it was arranged that the morrow should witness a grand moose hunt.

They would, of course, have to go on snow-shoes, for the ground was covered to a depth of more than two feet on the level; should the moose break out of their enclosure they could not go far away on account of the difficulty they would experience in wading through the snow, as the crust would not hold them while the young hunters could slide all around them, the thin layer of ice that had lately formed on the surface being just to their liking.

Anson even figured on just how he would cure what meat they secured, and arrange the head of the royal victim where it would add picturesqueness to their lodge in the vast wilderness.

Such confidence was charming, Caleb declared, though he knew the other meant it when he said the moose had not the shadow of a chance to elude them, once his stamping grounds were discovered.

They saw to it that everything was in apple-

pie order, rifles fully loaded, straps on the snowshoes, and even the edges of their hunting knives made keen, for it is esteemed dangerous work, braving the rage of a bull moose; and the breaking of a strap on a snowshoe has ere now been the means of a hunter's death under such conditions.

There are times when a stitch in time not only saves nine, but human lives as well; and our boys were careful.

It was snowing a little the next morning, but Anson was too full of the subject to think of putting it off, so after breakfast they started, filled with delightful anticipations as to the outcome.

A long tramp was before them, but both were fresh and vigorous, and had no complaint on that score.

About an hour before noon they arrived in the nighborhood of the yard, and Anson counseled extreme caution in approaching, since the moose has an extraordinarily fine sense of smell, and one whiff of their presence would send the lot crashing the snow heaps, adding to the perils of the chase, and making success less certain.

Caleb came close at his heels carrying his rifle.

Foot by foot they crept along, taking advan-

tage of every bush and heap of snow; and the fact that Anson had been here before gave them an advantage, as he only had to follow his yesterday's trail, the wind holding in the same general quarter, and blowing from the moose toward them.

Finally, after some time spent in this approach, during which Caleb was thrilled with the sounds coming to his ears, he was allowed to raise his head slowly and take a peep.

The snow had commenced to fall quite heavily now, and this served as an additional protection.

Caleb saw several gaunt animals, looking, as his chum had said, like mules, moving from one end of a yard to the other in a restless manner, now and then reaching up to pull a branch down and strip it of twigs.

At first he thought the old bull had gone, and was feeling intense disappointment on account of Anson, who had counted so on getting those horns; but presently a movement in one corner caught his eye, and he was thrilled to see the size of the animal that stood there, now commencing to strike his hoofs into the frozen ground in a suggestive manner.

"He scents us some way or other," Caleb whispered to his comrade, as the old bull gave what seemed to be a whistle, and shook his

horns with a crash against the branches of the tree overhead.

"I'm afraid so; but it only hurries things a bit. I'm going to take my crack at the old warrior now. Be ready to back me up, and pay no attention to any of the others at first. If he falls as if killed, you try and pot that half-grown youngster; I'd like him for meat, for the grandad is as tough as shoestrings, most likely. Now, watch your eye!"

This Anson whispered in the ear of his friend in the faintest sort of way; but Caleb knew what was expected of him, and had already picked out the youngest of the four animals.

When Anson fired it was necessary for the other to watch to see what the result of his shot might be, and thus he lost sight of the bull's mate and young for a dozen seconds; when he did find time to turn his attention that way they had broken bounds and disappeared from sight.

They would not have tender meat that day, at least, it seemed.

As for the king bull, he went down with a crash at the sound of the rifle, and floundered there upon the ground in a manner that was in one sense pitiful.

Twice he made as if about to scramble to his

feet, and Caleb kept his gun swinging in his direction, ready to cut loose the instant there seemed any necessity for it, but it would appear that the young marksman had made the master shot of his career, and actually touched the heart of the grand old bull with his lead, so that death overtook the monarch of the snow woods then and there.

Caleb was intensely interested in seeing him go under, for never had he watched so large an animal give up; but there was pity mingled with exultation in the shout the two lads sent up as the bull finally keeled over and lay still.

He was a majestic figure, even lying there in death.

Time, however, would not allow of their standing and neglecting their duties, so they soon got to work.

How they were ever going to get that grand head with its majestic horns down the long valley to the camp was a puzzle; but Anson had been figuring it out, and announced that he had come prepared to draw it up into a tree with a rope and pulley, and some day later he would come with a sledge he had made, upon which it could readily be taken to the cabin and prepared for keeping.

Those portions of the meat which could be made into stews and soup they wrapped up in

the hide, and passing a stout stick through the package were able to transport the same with many rests, to camp.

Caleb noticed that for a short time his friend seemed to exult over the downing of the great moose; but after a while Anson's manner changed, and he took on what seemed to be a serious state of mind.

At first Caleb imagined he had been seized with remorse because the little family had been left without a head and protector; but upon broaching the subject to his chum it was received with a shrug of the shoulders and a sad smile.

"Sorry I'm not quite so tender-hearted as that; but to tell you the truth, my boy, it suddenly dawned upon me that I may have unwittingly broken the game law, and killed a moose out of season. Strange to say, we neglected to bring a copy of the New York game laws with us, and I'm not sure when the time for open season on moose ends, or whether the matter is even mentioned, seeing that these animals are past history to a great extent in the state. If I find I have done so you can depend upon it I'll make a point of seeing a warden as soon as we come out of here and pay my fine like a little man. I give you my word, Cale, it never occurred to me until yesterday,

and the killing happened a week back. One thing I'm glad of, and that is you didn't have any chance to add another victim to the score. One will be heavy enough, if it's so," he said solemnly.

And Caleb believed him, for he would have no object in stating what was not so, and Anson had always been found to be the very essence of honor.

He was doubly glad that he had not been able to knock over the young moose, for it would have been a constant reproach to him to know he had broken the law, and the fine must have eaten heavily into his profits of the season.

So, after all, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and while Caleb had felt a bit downcast at the time he failed to bag his moose he was now pleased.

During this long interval he had managed to catch four more foxes in various traps, but the little rascals were mighty sly, and more frequently stole the bait with nothing to show for it but a few red hairs along the teeth of the contraption that was warranted to hold them.

Two more months would see them through, for it was now well into Feruary, and, indeed, nearing March; but winter holds in these high

altitudes much longer than further south, and the ice sometimes does not go out of the lakes until the warm breath of April comes along.

As game had become quite scarce by this time, they found it necessary to husband their resources somewhat, and more than once both ate, and really enjoyed a delightfully baked musquash, the very dish at which they had come near turning up their noses earlier in the season.

Other meals were made from canned things Anson had insisted on bringing along, and stews formed from dried bear meat or venison that had anything but an inviting appearance until that young wizard of the cook stove took hold and turned them into a most palatable dish, capable of appeasing hunger and arousing the warmest praise of the chef at the same time.

Plainly, Anson was a fellow worth knowing, and surely he must have a strain of French blood in him, else would he never have been able to get up such delightful dishes out of nothing.

Then March came in, boisterous and still bitter cold; but our lads were snug in their retreat, and cared little about the falling of the mercury many degrees below the zero point in

the little thermometer hanging just outside the door.

One day when stormbound Caleb went all over his bundle of furs, and found to his delight that they were in an excellent state of preservation. They numbered several hundred in all, for the muskrats had responded nobly to his appeal, and promised to head the list in number and value, with the mink a good second.

At the time Anson laughingly declared the cabin presented the appearance of a Hudson Bay trading post, with the factor bargaining for the season's output of pelts on the part of a Cree Indian from the Saskatchewan region.

But it was pleasure to Caleb to look around and think that his had been the hand to gather in every one of that vast collection of splendid furs.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN INVASION OF THE "HAUNTED LAND."

As Anson was the rover, circulating through various sections of the surrounding country in search of fresh meat, it was natural that most of the adventures should come to him.

Caleb jokingly called himself the "keeper of the home."

His duties were pretty much along a monotonous line, trudging faithfully day by day to the extreme limit of his trap route, removing what victims fortune had given over to the tender mercies of the Newhouse jaws, securing their skins, resetting the traps, and finally stretching the pelts after he had returned home.

He had very little time for any deviation from this set programme.

With Anson it was different.

He could as he chose take a trip in this quarter or that; and tiring of one method of hunting bring another into play.

Time softened the memory of a previous experience, when he strayed off and found himself lost; besides, he was so much more expe-

rienced now that the possibility of doing such a thing had little terror for him.

His health had become a joke between them, for this life so close to the heart of Nature had given Anson the appetite of a brawny logger, as he declared, and never had he shown one-half the vigor as when living thus in the open.

Caleb was happy in the thought that in some measure he could plume himself on this happy condition of affairs.

Only for his bright thought of a winter in the woods the city lad must have gone back to New York, and doubtless missed all of this priceless heritage.

For some little time Anson, without saying much to Caleb, had been preparing for a longer trip to the north than any he had as yet taken.

There was a section of country lying there that he wanted to see before breaking camp in the Spring; and as that time was drawing gradually nearer he felt that the expedition could not long be delayed now.

In fact, he was only waiting until there were certain signs of some fair weather ahead; for at least he wished to make a decent start, no matter what happened later.

This time he did not keep his chum in ignorance of his intentions.

When it looked favorable one evening he spoke to Caleb about his intentions; so they discussed the matter pro and con all the time they sat there by the fire, with the young trapper working over his day's catch.

This time Anson meant to start right.

He would take the compass, plenty of matches and ammunition, and not forgetting pemmican to last several meals if necessary, for he expected being away one night at least.

The boys had prepared this dried venison after the manner Uncle Abner described in his memoirs; and at the time John Sebattis, the old Penobscot Indian, visited them, he had pronounced the stuff quite palatable, though able to give them a few valuable hints as to how it might be improved the next time they tried.

But Anson found it fine to have a handful of the same in his pocket when out on an extended tramp; chewing it seemed to impart new vigor to lagging footsteps; and helped to sustain the tired body wonderfully.

So when the morning came and the signs were still propitious, he completed the few preparations needful, and then said good-bye to his chum.

Caleb looked a bit mournful to see him go off, so that the other's heart began to reproach him more or less.

Still, it would be only for one night, and after all might prove a good thing all around, since the boys would realize how very necessary each had become for the general happiness.

Anson's heart was full of brotherly love for his comrade as he tramped off that bright morning; and he amused himself in planning all manner of good things which he meant to do for Caleb later on, thanks to the kind fortune that had showered him with abundant means.

With buoyant feelings that every now and then caused him to whistle softly, or troll the words of some popular ditty, Anson strode along, full of the overflowing vigor of health.

He laughed to think how utterly unequal to even a third of this task he would have been six months before.

Truly this winter in the wilderness had been the luckiest thing that had ever happened to him; and he would never cease to bless the happy inspiration that had caused Caleb to project the expedition.

For several hours he was going over terri-

tory that was very familiar to him, because of frequent journeys up this way.

Here was the tree from which he had shot an enraged buck—a little further on and he could see where the trail broke, one branch leading in the direction of the home camp of John Sebattis, and the other pushing still on into the great wilderness that seemed to beckon enticingly to the young Nimrod.

Here he started on new ground, for up to this morning Anson had not gone beyond a certain limit.

Immediately it seemed as though his interest grew by leaps and bounds, for his eager eyes fell upon new sights as he pushed steadily onward, reckoning his course by his compass, as well as the many signs known to old woodsmen, and with which Anson was now growing quite familiar.

There is always more or less delight in leaving the old beaten rut and starting out along new lines; especially to a lad of Anson's character, with eyes on the alert for everything bordering on the novel.

He trudged along steadily, avoiding the pitfalls that lay in the way, where the snow had drifted into ravines and gullies, and might engulf an unwary traveler.

Progress was not quite as fast as he might

have wished; but he enjoyed every minute of the time after leaving the old trail.

He had become quite an adept by this time with the snow shoes, and could even give the more stocky Caleb points in such species of travel; so that most of the time he actually forgot that he was making use of a means of pedestrianism which had been utterly unknown to him a short three months previous.

When talking with Sebattis, Anson had asked numerous questions in connection with this country to the far north, and smiled because the old Indian shrugged his shoulders when declaring that he never hunted or trapped in that section because he believed it was "haunted" territory.

He never could quite understand what was meant by this remark; but somehow took to the idea that something strange occurring at some time in the past had appealed to a primitive belief in spirits, so that to Indians the northland was set apart as accursed.

When noon came he munched some of the food he had carried along with him, but made no lengthy halt, stopping only long enough to rest his legs a bit.

Already he felt glad that he had come, for the country was well worth seeing, its forma-

tion being totally different from that to which he had grown accustomed during their stay.

He had not fired a shot as yet.

In fact, it surprised him that game seemed so scarce up here, where the Indians never came; and he wondered if after all it might not prove to be the haunt of certain guides who avoided civilization during the months when not employed at their regular calling.

Two hours later and Anson had begun to cast his eye up toward the sky in a way that told of some apprehension.

There had been a change gradually taking place, and the signs of the early morning proved deceptive; in fact, he was beginning to believe that fortune had another disagreeable experience in store for him.

However, by this time Anson had come to rely upon himself so thoroughly that nothing of this kind could dismay him.

Should a storm descend he knew what to do and was quite prepared for bad weather in any shape, so that even this prospect failed to convince him that it would be the part of wisdom to turn back.

Anson chanced to be given his full share of stubbornness—once he started in to accomplish anything, no matter how simple, he could not

be happy until he had exhausted every known device in the attempt to bring success.

No doubt it was an admirable trait and would help to carry him along the flood tide to victory many a time, but then he was apt to suffer frequently from this quality of determination.

At three o'clock he saw the first scattered snowflakes floating down, innocent enough looking in themselves, but harbingers of what was to come.

Then Anson began to hedge a trifle and wonder whether it would really pay him to go any further.

Of course, he had penetrated deep enough into the unknown land to prevent his returning to the home camp on that day—that much was settled.

"I'd like to gain that little ridge ahead there, and I will! Somehow it looks inviting, and perhaps just on the side I might be able to find a snug nest to pass the night in. So here goes!"

Hardly had he made a start before the flakes began to come down more thickly, and in five minutes he could not see far in any direction.

But Anson did not pull up; he had said that he was going to get to that ridge less than half

a mile away, and unless an earthquake intervened he must carry out his word.

So he pushed on, with his head bent against the rising storm.

Of course there was always the possibility that if another half foot of snow fell it would make the going very hard; just now there was more or less of a smooth glaze on the surface, where the snow had melted and then frozen again, over which he could glide with surprising rapidity at times, and this would be done away with under the new conditions.

But with the buoyancy of youth Anson would have nothing to do with this thought when it cropped up; let tomorrow take care of itself, since there was no use in crossing a bridge before one came to it.

Presently the snow was coming down furiously; indeed, he could not remember of having ever seen it descending in such enormous quantities.

Through the storm he pushed, slowly but grimly, with the memory of that ridge ahead drawing him on.

He had concluded now that it would serve his purpose quite enough if he only reached the ascent, since he had never said he would climb to the backbone of the elevation.

No doubt with the storm facing him he

would find the best shelter along the base and could make a temporary camp as soon as he found a favorable spot.

This might be in some sheltered gully, where the drifting snow could be kept at bay, or else a hollow tree might open up possibilities that were not to be despised under the circumstances

With the advent of the storm the cold seemed to increase, so that it was not long before Anson began to view with considerable satisfaction the cheery blaze he would presently start, at which he could toast his shins and defy the rude elements to do their worst.

Surely the base of the ridge must be very close at hand now.

He had figured on it accurately and was keeping to a direct course, thanks to that fine little compass, which at such a time was apt to prove almost as valuable as its larger duplicate would to a storm-tossed mariner on the bosom of the raging deep.

"Must have been something deceiving about that distance, for I declare I've come about twice as far as I thought that ridge was off, but I'm going to get there if it takes the balance of the day," he said to himself.

Somehow the lonely woods are apt to make one commune with himself more or less, and

there were times when Anson actually debated some knotty problem just as earnestly as though he had a companion along who took an opposing side.

He trudged on, gritting his teeth and trying to make light of the task.

Game was the last thing he thought of now, especially since he had been so very wise as to fetch an abundant supply of food along to make himself comfortable for several days to come if pressed.

There was no reason why he should not have halted at an overturned tree he came upon and install himself under its friendly lee; but since there was as yet no indication of a rise to the ground he knew he had not carried his resolution into effect, and this would be a sign of weakening.

"No, I won't!" he declared, as he turned his back on the haven of refuge, and once more lowered his head to the storm; "it's a case of 'Pike's peak or bust!' with me, and I'm going to find that side of the ridge or drop trying."

For once it chanced that this spirit of grit was destined to carry Anson along a channel leading to a most remarkable happening, and looking back later on, he really never found

cause to regret allowing himself to be guided by a streak of stubbornness.

"Eureka! I believe I've got there at last, for the ground begins to elevate at this point. That being settled, I can now with a clear conscience look about for the mate to that fallen tree. If a storm passed through this section when it went down, surely there must be others," he said aloud.

It was indeed time he thought of stopping.

The snow had already fallen to a depth of more than an inch, and was sifting down at a rate simply dreadful.

"Why, if this keeps up through the night there will be more than an even foot of the nasty mess on top of the crust by morning," he thought, as he turned to the left in order to follow the base of the uplift.

There was no reason under the sun just why he should have turned to the left rather than the right just then, but had he yielded to the first whim that seized upon his fancy he would have missed something that must all his life have proven a lasting regret, could he but have known it.

Keeping as bright a lookout as possible for some refuge, he pushed forward.

The ridge kept the keen wind from striking in with the force it must show further

up, where it had a clear sweep, and this was one of the reasons why the young hunter had decided to seek the base of the rise.

"There it is, just what I've been looking for!" he suddenly exclaimed, as he caught sight of another giant of the forest stretched along the ground, its roots having torn up the soil as they were forced to let go their grip.

The mass of roots and earth reared up some five feet high, and besides, there was quite a little cavity where they had been forced from the ground.

Many a woods ranger has made his camp in just such a retreat at times of stress, and Anson knew it full well.

He immediately got to work with a vim.

Laying aside the gun and such other things as were apt to impede his labor, he started in to make a fire.

Not for naught had he taken lessons in the art of coaxing a blaze to spring up when everything around seemed to be soaked with rain or buried under three feet of clinging snow.

He knew where to look for the dry heart of the fallen woods monarch, and it was not more than three minutes before smoke, and then a cheery little spirit of flame announced that he had succeeded in his labors.

It would not be long now ere this delightful

season of play must draw to a close, and both Caleb and himself return once more to civilization.

This unpleasant fact impressed itself many times on Anson's mind and made him the more eager to enjoy what remained of his vacation in the woods.

So he threw himself with all his heart into the present occasion and was determined to extract all the enjoyment possible from his little adventure.

With the camp hatchet which he carried at his hip he cut considerable wood; for the supply was really inexhaustible, with the branches of the dead tree lumbering the ground all about his refuge.

Thus the camp fire leaped up more and more furiously as the blaze took hold of the resinous pine.

He had cleared the snow away as best he could, so as to have an opening in which to seat himself.

Rapidly the ground dried under the influence of the heat, and given sufficient fuel to last the night through, Anson could see no reason why he should not be as snug as though at home.

"Anyhow," he chuckled, as he prepared to make a cup of tea in his little pannikin; "I

hardly think I'll be bothered with a panther coming down the chimney, as happened to us in our bungalow retreat."

Nevertheless, he cast more than one glance up into neighboring trees and wondered whether the night would really pass without some sort of adventure arriving.

It seemed to be a settled thing that something beyond the common must come to pass whenever he got out of the rut.

The snow drifted down heavily and Anson was casting about in his mind just how he might manage to form some sort of shelter above by utilizing the branches torn from a hemlock nearby, when he suddenly sat up as if listening.

A minute passed, while he remained in this attitude, and then he laughed, exclaiming:

"I must be getting nervous or foolish to think I heard a distant shout just then. It may have been the whine of the storm on the top of the ridge where the wind pelts along, or else a mooning old owl in the forest away off yonder. The chances are there isn't a solitary human being within ten miles of me right now."

Having thus satisfied his mind on this score, he again turned to the work of getting the water to the boiling point so that he could brew

the pannikin of fragrant herb which "cheers but does not inebriate."

This had just been accomplished, and setting the mixture aside to steep for a few minutes, he began munching at some of the food carried in the little bag he kept slung over his shoulder and which besides contained the few simple medicines Anson seldom went without.

He had just taken a sip of the warming fluid, when once more he started.

"That time there was no mistake; somebody called, and unless my hearing is away off, it was the word, 'Help!' I heard," he said.

The idea electrified him.

Comfortably situated as he was himself, he could yet easily imagine someone else in distress, for the memory of John Sebattis' condition came to his mind at the time the old Indian was wounded and helped by the opportune arrival of the young hunter.

He immediately sent back an answering shout.

It was returned and he knew that whoever the other might prove to be he must have caught sight of the glow of the fire, despite the falling snow, and was approaching the same

Anson's first thought was to go out to meet the unknown, but he immediately saw the folly

of doing such a thing, so he only set more water on the fire to heat, so that he might offer some refreshment to the stranger when he arrived.

"It's the voice of a white and not an Indian. Perhaps some hunter from the city, staying up here through the winter for the same reason as myself, may have become lost. Anyhow, there's only one thing for me to do, and that's to welcome him to my camp, such as it is."

He thought it very strange why the sounds came closer so very slowly.

"Why, you'd think the chap was crawling along, he makes such poor progress. Am I going to play the good Samaritan act a second time in one season, and is he also wounded in some way? Jove! It's a nasty night for anything like that to happen, and I guess it was lucky he discovered my fire when the snow let up for a little while. There! I saw something moving and it must be him."

With considerable curiosity he watched the spot to ascertain what sort of a visitor fortune had sent his way.

And as the limping figure came closer his surprise deepened into amazement.

"Why, it's a boy, and a little fellow, too. He looks like he might be the son of one of

these Adirondack guides. They say they can shoot a deer as soon as they can lift their dad's rifle. But he limps like he was hurt!"

His sympathy was immediately aroused, and leaving his fire, he even hurried forward to meet the newcomer half way.

The boy was nearly a head shorter than Anson, though stockily built.

Just then his bronzed face was a mixture of determination and pain.

"Glad to have you show up," said Anson, as he reached the other, who was peering at him with considerable surprise; for, of course, it must have appeared very strange to him to find one of those city sportsmen, and a mere boy at that, alone in the far north woods at this season of the year.

He pointed down at his left foot.

"Sprained her on a root, mister. Fust time ever, and it makes me madder than I kin tell you to hev it come jest now!" he said.

"Well, let me help you to my poor camp. I'm a little of a doctor myself, and while you're getting some warm tea inside of you I'll take a look at the ankle," said Anson, as he forced the other to lean on him.

The backwoods boy gripped an old rifle in his hand to which he clung as though it was as much an object of affection as the beauti-

ful repeating Marlin could be to the city sportsman.

Why not, when doubtless it had many a time stood in the breach when possibly hunger or even starvation threatened a disaster?

He noticed that when he mentioned the word "doctor" the other turned to stare at him incredulously, and that an eager light sprang into his keen eyes; so might a shipwrecked mariner find new cause for hope when sighting a palm-fringed isle in the midst of the tropical sea on which he has tossed until in despair.

"A doctor—you?" he muttered; and then burst out with: "Oh, mister, then perhaps you kin help us out. I was jest agoin' to the settlement to try an' git one to come out hyar, if so be he would, to save our leetle gal Sue; but marm she says as how it would be too late anyhow. But I jest couldn't stay to hum an' see her adyin', so I started, when this pesky sprain knocked me out!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ANSON WINS HIS SPURS.

Of course, Anson was more or less thrilled by what the boy had said.

He could imagine that sudden sickness coming to the family of one of these woods guides in the dead of winter, when they were so far removed from civilization and an almost impassable barrier between themselves and a physician, must be a serious matter, indeed.

Naturally he wondered why the man himself had not started for help long before it was too late.

Could it be possible that this mere boy was struggling along, trying to support a family by such simple means as hunting and trapping?

That might account for the scarcity of game in this section where Anson had expected finding it so abundant, and perhaps in a roundabout way the presence here of this lone family might have given the superstitious Indians their belief that the region were haunted.

He said nothing just then, however, and when they reached the camp Anson made the other sit down in the comfortable spot he had just vacated.

"Here, drink some of this stuff; it will warm you up, and then bite away at this pemmican if you feel like it. I'm going to have a look at that ankle right off," he declared.

He was as good as his word, and while the strange boy sat there sipping of the nectar that was contained in the pannikin and watching him eagerly, Anson lost no time in getting the deerskin moccasin off and taking a look at the sprain.

"Not so bad as I feared, old fellow," he announced, presently; "painful enough, I guess, and if you tried to walk all the way to the nearest settlement I think you'd be laid up for two months. But if you handle it carefully you can get about in a week."

"A week! Oh, what would they be adoin' all that time?" groaned the other, as he ground his strong white teeth together and half made as if to rise.

"Here, sit still while I get your moccasin on again, after I rub some liniment on the ankle and bind it up to give strength."

He looked at the boy while he was doing this.

"How far away is your home?" he asked, finally.

"Not more'n a mile er so, I reckon. Ye see, mister, I'd jest got fair started out when this

pesky thing happened to me; but I kept on, thinkin' it might go away by usin' the foot; but she didn't, only got wuss an' wuss. Then I peeped yer fire, when the blamed snow let us, an' I hollered. I thort as how it might be a camp o' them city gentlemen, and p'raps one o' 'em was a doctor. But I tell you I jest gotter be goin' on. It's all o' ten miles to the village where Doc Peters hangs out, an' I reckon I'll hev to crawl ther somehow."

"No you won't, if I know it. See here, what's your name, anyhow?" asked Anson, as he made up his mind.

"It's Abe, mister," replied the other, his face taking on an eager expression, as some thought flashed through his brain.

"Well, mine is Anson Garraway. Do you think you could lead the way back to your home, Abe?" demanded the owner of the camp.

"Course I could, easy. I know every foot o' this here kentry. Ort to, 'case ain't I jest hunted it dry an' trapped every livin' varment outen it these times? What you wanter know for, mister? Thinkin' o' goin' back with me, are yuh?"

"Yes, if so be you can hobble all the way. I told you I was something of a doctor. I hope to be a regular one some fine day. Perhaps

I couldn't be of much use to your little sister, but I'd do my best, you know," said Anson.

There was something about this young stranger that seemed to inspire great confidence in the heart of the backwoods boy.

Perhaps it sprang from the deft way in which Anson had taken hold of his own trouble, or it might be the manner of the young fellow from the city was such as to arouse new hopes that a kindly Providence had sent him along just in the nick of time.

"I believe you'd do the trick, sure, mister. I'll pilot yuh back to the shack right away, after I get a little rested. This hyar stuff goes right to the spot, too. We used ter hev some like it oncet, before—say, how ma'd like to taste this again, mister. Kin I save the rest o' it for her?"

"Nonsense; drink it down. There's plenty more where that came from, and when we get to your place I promise you she shall have all I happen to have with me. Now, let's warm up good and take a bite. Then we'll make a start; that is, if you feel able to navigate.

Abe looked at him almost scornfully.

"Huh!" he snorted, as he lowered the pannikin again; "I tell you I'd a gotter the settlement, mister, ef I jest hed to crawl thar! I went five miles with a broken leg oncet, and

thet was when I was littler than I be now. But let's start jest as quick as we kin. Mam'll be some s'prised to see me come back so soon, an' with a *doctor,* too!"

Unconsciously, perhaps, the chest of the other yellow fellow swelled just a little at hearing himself given this enviable title for the first time.

"In about fifteen minutes we'll make a start. I'm going to help you all I can while we tramp along, Abe. I know what a sprain is, and how it knocks out even the strongest of men," he said, smilingly.

"Yep, thet's so, 'case when dad——" and then the boy stopped short as he buried his nose once more in the vessel that held the tea.

Anson thought he noted some slight sign of confusion about the other, but as he had many things to hold his attention he soon forgot the fact.

"Is your father away from home just now?" he inquired, half expecting to hear that he was dead, and the burden of looking after the family resting on the shoulders of this boy of twelve.

"Yep. He never does stay around no more, anyhow. When he drinks he's ugly as sin, and when he can't git any booze he's mad anyhow. So we don't count on him no more; mam

an' me is runnin' the fambly," Abe volunteered, proudly.

"How many are there besides you and mam?"

"Little Sue, Billie boy and Casper; but Casper he's sick most of the time, so he can't do much, only chop wood. I run the traps and git ther bacon, wen ther is any tuh git. Sometimes—but ain't you goin' to eat somethin', too, boss?"

Somehow Anson was more affected by this dramatic meeting of the backwoods boy than he could ever remember being before in his life. He had always been a favorite of fortune so far as having plenty of money went, and with not a wish ungratified, save in the line of health; and it was hard for him to realize that this mere child, for Abe was hardly more in point of years, had bucked up against all the vicissitudes of life, such as usually come only to grown men.

He satisfied his appetite by tearing at some of the tough dried deer meat, and then finished the second helping of warm tea.

"I'm ready to make a start just when you are," he announced; since they had to accomplish the undertaking, the sooner they began the pilgrimage the better, for the snow was getting deeper all the time.

Abe had been wearing snowshoes, of course, though he had unfastened these when reaching the fire.

He now started to once more secure the unwieldy objects to his feet, though the other saw him wince with pain when attaching the left one.

"Plenty of pluck all right," muttered Anson, who somehow had taken quite a fancy for the boy with the face as brown as that of an Indian—anyone who had stood manfully by his mother when the father and husband, who should have supplied the necessities of life, failed in his duties, must command his sincere admiration.

When he had secured all of his possessions Anson called out cheerily:

"Now lead off, Abe, and make as much of a bee line as you can, because that foot of yours needs quiet. Here, I told you to lean on me; I'm feeling fine and dandy, so don't hold back a minute."

The suffering lad did not make any verbal reply, but if looks could speak then the one he bent on his new companion must have stood for volumes.

It was slow work.

Despite Abe's grit and his desire to appear stronger than he really was, they got over the

ground at what seemed almost a snail's pace to Anson.

Still, he restrained his impatience.

The day would not be done for nearly half an hour yet, and Abe was so confident of knowing every foot of the country under any conditions that Anson did not take the trouble of consulting his compass.

He was glad to see that their course was along the foot of the uplift, and it seemed more than likely that the cabin home of the dissipated guide would finally prove to be located under the shelter of the ridge.

"I wish I had happened to shoot something while on my tramp today," he said, as a thought came into his head that possibly the family might be in need of food.

"Oh, we got plenty o' grub, mister. I looked out fur thet. When everything else goes back on us we allers hes musquash, yuh know, an' them ain't bad, if so be yer hungry," declared the other, sturdily.

Remembering the taste he had had of the baked muskrat, Anson was not sure whether he could stand such fare very long; but then he knew others were less particular with regard to what they ate than himself—Caleb for one had pronounced the dish quite edible, and said that if they only knew just how the In-

dians cooked it, he for one believed he would like it very much.

The minutes dragged along, and yard by yard they proceeded.

Although possibly he did not realize the fact, the boy with the sprained ankle kept leaning more and more heavily on the arm of his companion.

"He'd never have got to the settlement alive," thought Anson, noticing this significant fact; "and yet with that grit there's no telling what a fellow might do. But secretly I'll be glad myself when we come on the shack."

"We're nearly tuh hum, mister," grunted Abe finally; "see thet big hemlock yonder ahangin' over, with all the snow on it like a white beard—well, it's right underneath the shack holds out. Look sharp an' ye kin see smoke curling up through the branches. Gee! mam'll be some s'prised to see me again so quick!"

He braced up considerably under the inspiration of having arrived at home once more, and Anson could see a new glitter in his eyes that told of the unquenchable spirit animating the lad.

In this manner then they drew up to the door

of a cabin that nestled under the shelter of the enormous hemlock, a landmark in itself.

Abe himself opened the door.

"Come right in, doctor," he said, with an attempt at putting on airs.

Doubtless he had all the sensation of the wizard who has declared his intention of creating something where nothing grew; since he had gone forth a few hours previously with the avowed purpose of traveling over ten miles of deep snows, through a raging storm, to the village, in order to fetch back a physician; and here he was able to produce the goods on short notice.

Anson followed him across the threshold.

He saw a couple of boys hovering over the fireplace and a tired looking woman bending above a cot in the corner, on which the sick child evidently lay.

She looked around in evident amazement at hearing Abe speak those magical words, but seeing only a boy enter after him her expression became one of bitter disappointment.

"Mammy, here's the doctor come. Met him in ther woods. Yuh see, I gotter sprain in my foot, an' jest happened to run acrost ther doctor's camp," said Abe, as he limped forward, dragging Anson with him.

"Him?" gasped the woman, and turning a

despairing look toward the little girl writhing on the cot.

"Excuse me, ma'am, but while I'm nc a *regular* doctor, I know something about medicine and expect some day to practice. Old John Sebattis says I'm all right. Perhaps you know him, ma'am. And I'd be willing to do all I could to help you out, because Abe never could have reached town alive."

Something seemed to revive hope in the heart of the despairing mother; perhaps it was the fine, frank, manly manner of the boy, or it may be she began to have faith upon hearing that Sebattis, whom she must know, recommended the youth.

"Oh, if you only could do something to save little Sue. She's my baby, and the only gal I've got. Please try, doctor. I'd get right down on my knees and bless you if only you could save Sue!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands.

Anson saw that anxiety had quite worn her out and he knew that first of all he must calm the mother before he began to pay any attention to the sick child.

So he spoke soothingly to her and used his entire power to chase away the look of worry from her brow.

Then he bent over the little girl and began

to feel of her pulse with all the gravity of a veteran physician, while the others hung about him, waiting with hushed breath for the dread verdict.

"Oh, can you save her; will she live?" pleaded the poor woman, after Anson had examined the child's tongue and asked several questions that had a distinct bearing on the matter.

"I don't think there is any doubt about it, ma'am. In fact, to tell you the bare truth, I don't believe the child is seriously ill at all. Perhaps if she had had no medical attention for several days she might have passed into a more critical stage," the boy said, gravely.

"But see, she is burning up with fever, and it has refused to go away even when I tried the old-fashioned remedies my mother used to use. That was what frightened me. I never had such a scare before," she declared.

"Yes, she has quite a high fever; but I think I can break that up in short order, ma'am. Please get me a cup with a little cold water in it."

How pleased the boy was that he had seen fit to thrust several little remedies into that duffle bag of his ere starting forth, even though he did not anticipate having any use for them while absent from camp.

He administered the remedy with all the gravity of an old medical man, the staring eyes of little Billie, Casper and Abe following every movement.

"In half an hour I think we will find her beginning to perspire, and then I'll give another remedy. Meanwhile we can do nothing but wrap her up warmly and wait. If you have water in the kettle perhaps you would like a cup of tea yourself, ma'am? Abe and I had ours in my camp."

"Tea! I ain't tasted such a thing for months, sir. I believe it *would* make me feel a great deal better to have a cup," and her wistful eyes followed his action as he opened the small packet and disclosed quite a large handful of the precious herb, quite enough for half a dozen brews.

"We'll be breaking camp in a couple of weeks and I think I'll have quite a pound and more left over, which you're welcome to, ma'am. I never take anything out of the woods in the eating line."

"Oh, thank you, young sir, you are very kind! Please don't think it was always this way with me. There was a time when my man brought in everything any woman could want, for he was a good guide, one of the best in the woods; but strong drink ruined our

happy home, and ever since we've been on the downward grade. If it hadn't been for my Abe here, Heaven knows what would have become of us all," and she put her thin hand caressingly upon the frowsy head of the boy who had the sprained ankle and who seemed to have forgotten all his own suffering since arriving home.

"I'm mighty glad to have made Abe's acquaintance in the way I did, and I want to tell you, ma'am, that a woman never had a better boy than you've got. Why, he was bent on getting to the village with that sprained ankle, and he would have gone anyway, only I told him I was something of a doctor. I imagine Abe doesn't take after his father much, does he?"

"In some things, yes, and in others not a bit. He hates liquor like sin and says he never will have anything to do with it nohow," she replied, caressing the sorrel top of her oldest affectionately.

When the tea was ready she had set a table after a fashion, and there was some cooked venison heated over which tasted appetizing to Anson when he was urged to sit down.

It certainly did him good to see how the poor woman enjoyed her tea, a luxury from which she had long been deprived.

Afterwards he once more brought his medical knowledge to bear upon the case, and finding that the first remedy had indeed broken the fever, as he expected, he gave another medicine entirely, which was to be continued through the night.

Then they sat and talked for a time, but Anson noticed that the woman seemed to avoid saying anything more about herself and her troubles; perhaps pride may have had something to do with it, and she disliked speaking about the meanness of the one who should have been there at her side, holding up his end of the family log.

"Now, I want you to stay with the little girl during the night, for she has to be given this medicine every hour, just as you saw me give it, a spoonful at a time. I see you have a loft, if that ladder leads anywhere, and if there is some straw or anything else up there, let me crawl up and get some sleep."

Anson meant every word of it, for he was really afraid the grateful mother would insist on his taking the only cot there was in sight besides that on which little Sue lay.

"I sleep up thar, mister. They's some furs to pull over yuh. I killed them three bars myself, didn't I mam? Little Billie and Casper they snoozes right here in front of the fire, so

they kin keep her goin' all night. Whenever yuh want to turn in jest say the word an' I'll light this candle," remarked Abe, who seemed wonderfully drawn toward Anson, especially when he had witnessed the magical results of his medical knowledge as shown in the case of little Sue.

"Well, I confess to feeling rather tired now, Abe, and if you don't mind I'd like to crawl up the ladder right away," answered Anson, yawning.

So the other lighted the stub of a tallow dip in the flame of the fire, after which he started to laboriously creep up the ladder.

"Now, why did you start to come up, when there was no need of it. You must learn to give that ankle some rest, Abe. Well, I should say that you *have* quite some fur up here, too. Get all these pelts yourself?" asked the city boy, as they reached the loft.

"Every lastin' one o' 'em," returned Abe, proudly, and this was probably one of the reasons why he insisted upon showing his guest to his sleep chamber rather than thrusting the the tallow dip into his hand and directing him.

"And this is your bunk?" pointing to a rude bed amidst some of the furs.

"It was, mister, but it's yourn now. I stay down to give the kid her stuff every hour, so

the pore mam, she kin sleep, see?" returned Abe, decisively.

Again did Anson feel drawn toward the half-grown lad; he certainly had not a selfish bone in his body, but was constantly thinking of some one besides himself.

Just as he had said, Anson was feeling more than a little tired, for he had put in quite an energetic day of it, since starting out from the home camp he had traversed many miles of territory, and some of it with the storm beating hard against him, not to mention the assistance he had rendered the lame lad.

"I'll be all right here, Abe. Better take some of these things with you, then, if you're going to lie down in front of the fire tonight. A board floor is a pretty tough proposition, as I've found to my cost. I can spare half and then have more than I need," he remarked.

Abe thought well of the idea, and departing, threw some of the pelt down ahead, among others a bearskin that must have once covered a tremendous animal.

"Good night," he said, rather shyly, offering his hand; "I'm mighty glad I met up with yuh, doctor. Thet leetle gal is all we got here, an' we thinks a heap o' Sue."

"How does your ankle feel, Abe?" asked

the other, to hide his blushes at these compliments.

"She's some better, I reckon; leastways I kin move her easier. Them rubbin's done a powerful lot of good, I'm thinkin'," came the reply, as Abe vanished over the edge of the loft.

Anson took off his shoes and crawled under the two bearskins; though they were not as pliable as one might have liked, the warmth was there, and since it was a cold night outside, with but little heat arising from the fire below, he believed he would need all the comfort he could get out of them.

While he lay there he could hear the wind moaning at the corners of the log house, or sighing through the snow laden branches of the sentinel hemlock.

The sounds had grown wonderfully familiar to Anson and he would certainly miss them, once he returned to the haunts of civilization.

Then he heard the low murmur of the voices below, as mother and son exchanged a few sentences, doubtless concerning the load of gratitude under which they were laboring in regard to the young stranger who had honored their humble roof with his presence.

That was the last sound he remembered

hearing as his senses gradually seemed to be wafted away into dreamland.

Once he awoke, thinking he had caught the sound of heavy footsteps without.

At first Anson could not wholly recall where he was, for darkness surrounded him; but almost immediately he recollected what had occurred and how he must be even then in the loft of the cabin where Abe and his poor mother tried to keep food in the mouths of the little family of five, all told.

Anson had unconsciously half raised his head to listen.

What could have awakened him?

Had the little sick child aroused and was she calling for a cooling drink—he hoped not, for such a thing might indicate that the fever had returned, and a condition of that sort would bring cause for worry.

Perhaps it was Abe groaning in his sleep; the brave-hearted little chap might be suffering more from his injury than he would admit.

Anson heard it again, and this time he knew for certain that it was a heavy step crunching in the snow outside; perhaps the party coming to the door of the cabin was even then removing his snowshoes, and it was one of these striking up against the door that had caused that last sound.

Anson sat upright now.

He thought enough of the circumstance to listen, and it was while he thus bent his ear to catch the next sound that a heavy pounding at the fastened door seemed to shake the very foundations of the woodman's cabin!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BOY IN THE LOFT.

No sooner had he heard that clamorous sound than the boy in the loft was able to give a pretty good guess as to what it meant.

The head of the little household had chosen to return to the bosom of his family at this particular time!

Of course, it was a matter that probably interested him not in the least; but at the same time Anson found himself lifting his head until he sat upright, and listening to hear what followed.

He understood from what he had heard that 'Abe and his mother were quite indifferent as to whether the husband and father ever showed up again, since for a long time he had not done his duty toward providing for the household that looked to him for support.

And yet there had been something like a wistful expression on the faded face of the woman at the time she made that remark concerning the fact of her once having had her daily cup of tea and all things that the wife of a guide might expect.

Voices below told that the sleepers had been aroused.

He heard the querulous tones of the little sick girl, inquiring if "dad" had come, and then Abe talked with his mother.

Again came that heavy pounding at the door; but no loud curses accompanied the sound, such as they were evidently accustomed to hear.

A light flashed up below, as Abe poked the smoldering fire into new life; and overcome with a sense of curiosity concerning the anticipated scene, Anson crept out from under the bearskins, crawling over to the brim of the loft flooring.

He saw Abe heading toward the door to take down the bar that secured the same.

Abe showed few signs of joy in his movements; indeed, his steps lagged more than a little, and it was evident that the homecoming of this father brought only anxiety, since they could not tell what dire calamity it might presage.

Then the door opened and a snow-covered man pushed in, shaking himself like a big Newfoundland dog.

The woman had succeeded in lighting the tallow dip again, and with the glow of the revived fire the big apartment below was fairly well illuminated.

And just about then the watching boy aloft

had one of the most unpleasant surprises of his entire life.

He caught sight of the face of the man who had entered, and who must undoubtedly be the guide who had deserted his family.

The last time he had seen that face was when a game warden, Harbison, had said good-bye and started out of the wilderness with two men accused of various breaches against the peace and the game laws.

Yes, almost unbelievable as it seemed, he knew that he was looking on the face of the red-bearded man, whom he remembered had been called Sol Barrow!

Then Abe was his son, this weary looking woman his wife, and the little sick girl his child.

Still looking, Anson heard the man say something to his wife that still further astonished the one above.

Evidently there must have been one warm spot in the heart of the big guide for this tiny girl, for it was of her he inquired.

"How is she, missus—how's the gal? I heard she was sick—Tony Craft told me that she was right bad when he passed by here. I was in the lockup, held by that skunk Harbison for shootin' game outen season; but when I heard *that* nawthin' was agoin' to keep me.

I broke out and hiked straight up here. Ain't got nary gun, an' never a bite has I had for two days, but I kim! Say, how's leetle Sue, missus?"

Before the woman could reply there was a gasp from the cot, and the sick child was seen sitting up, holding out her hands toward the father.

He uttered a cry and rushed straight over, taking her in his arms, while Abe and his mother looked at each other, as though hardly able to understand what all this meant.

As for the boy in the loft, he had to wink his eyes many times, for despite his efforts to refrain, he found that tears would start up, this meeting between the escaped prisoner and his child was so affecting.

"Perhaps Sol Barrow isn't wholly bad after all," he thought, as he watched the man kissing the pale face of the child, who had wrapped her puny arms around his great hairy neck. "He loves that tot all right, and proved it by risking his life many times in escaping from jail, and taking this terrible trip unarmed, hungry, and in danger of freezing. I declare, perhaps he may be well worth helping. I begin to feel drawn toward the man a little."

"Yes, if only he shows a desire to walk the straight path I'd like to help him ever so

much. When a man without any education, brought up here in the wilderness, and pretty much of a savage in his way, can show as much feeling as that, there's *something* in him worth saving, I guess," Anson went on, as he watched the scene that was being enacted below.

Barrow beckoned to his wife to approach, as he wrapped a cover around the child to keep her warm, for she would not allow her to put her down, and his coat was cold, though he had covered it well with a piece of Abe's fur collection before snatching Sue up.

"I got somethin' to tell you, too, old woman," the big man said, with what appeared to be a sheepish grin coming over his face, as Anson thought.

"Here," he went on, as he took something out of an inner pocket and handed it to her, "you kin read writin'. That's my mark at the bottom, where *she* signed my name for me. An', Polly, it's agoin' to be kept for keeps! Yuh never could git me to sign afore, but *she* showed me plain whar I was makin' a fool o' myself, an' I 'lowed I was. Kin yuh make her out, missus?"

"Oh, Sol! This is a pledge. It says that you ain't never agoin' to drink agin, so help you God. I cain't hardly believe it! Why, if only you cud do that it'd be like the old days

come back agin. Never drink agin? Abe, son, d'ye hear that? Guv yer dad yer hand, an' tell him that he's welcome home agin! Never drink agin! Oh, I hope I ain't jest adreamin' it!"

She clung to the big guide, who somehow managed to get an arm around her, after he had gravely shaken hands with the staring and mute Abe.

Altogether it was the most affecting picture the interested boy above had ever set eyes on, and he was forced to wipe the tears away several times as he watched the reunion of the little family.

"They've got Job on an old charge of shootin' a warden, and he's agoin' to be sent up for a heap o' years on it. That'll keep him away from me, and yuh know, Polly, 'twas his influence that kept adraggin' me down all the time. I'm in a peck o' trouble myself, an' p'raps I'll have to be shut up or pay a fine I never cud git the money for, but after it's all over I'm agoin' to try an' make it up to you an' the kids, I shore am!" the man was saying, soberly.

"Bully!"

For the life of him Anson could not help giving vent to that expressive and boyish

word, for he felt so full that something had to come out.

But the rumble of the man's voice doubtless prevented any of them from hearing it, for they paid no attention; indeed, just then the wonder and delight occasioned by Sol's reformation eclipsed everything else.

"How's the leetle gal, missus? She looks sick, too; but I reckons Tony Craft must a piled it on some to skeer me, 'cause he knowed how much I thort o' Sue," the guide was saying.

"Oh, she was awful sick, and I was that bad scart I thought she was agoin' to die. Abe, here, started to git a doctor, right through ten miles o' snow, an' a storm on; he sprained his foot, an' I don't know as how we'd ever a come out on'y he jes' happened to run acrost a young doctor in the woods and brung him along. He fetched Susie out o' the fever right quick, an' I reckon she's agoin' to git well now," came the answer from the woman, which warm words of praise made the listener blush with satisfaction.

"And yet they say a listener never hears anything good of himself," muttered Anson, smiling to himself.

He was groping for his shoes now.

If this happy family council was to keep

up below, sleep must be rendered impossible for him, and he did not know why he should not have some share in the talk.

"Who's that?" exclaimed the red-bearded man, starting half to his feet as he saw a movement at the top of the ladder.

A fugitive from justice, it was only natural that he should feel nervous over even the smallest happening, and those game wardens were known to resort to many shrewd tricks in order to gather in their prey.

"It's only the doctor, Sol. He's acomin' down to jine us, and take a look at leetle Sue. Sot still, Sol; he's the best friend we ever had," remarked the woman, laying a restraining hand on the arm of her husband.

Sol immediately sank back into his seat, but thought best to lay the child down on the cot and cover her again with the quilt.

So Anson dropped from the lower rungs of the ladder and turned to face them.

He knew that the big guide was due for a surprise, since as yet he had not the slightest suspicion in the world to whom his family was indebted for this assistance in their time of need.

Sol started to speak as the other advanced, and then the words died away on his lips so that he could only stand and stare, his hands

working convulsively the while. For he recognized in the "doctor" one of the young city "gents" who had seen him in the custody of Harbison, the game warden, and it angered the hot-tempered man.

"Hello, Sol! Glad to meet up with you again," sang out Anson, cheerily, as he extended his hand.

The guide's face was certainly a study just then, from amazement it changed to anger; he even growled a threat, and made as if to rush upon the smiling lad, when Abe with a cry of horror caught hold of him fiercely.

"What d'ye mean, dad; he's the doctor as pulled leetle Sue through! But fur him she might a ben dead, d'ye hear?" he exclaimed.

Sol staggered back, as though in the confusion of ideas he did not know what to do, and seizing this opportunity, Anson again addressed him.

"I want to be friends with you, Sol, believe me. What you did about breaking the game laws was done while under the influence of strong drink, I know and believe. I've just heard you say that you've cut that out forever, and I'm ready to use my influence with the head game warden to get you off this time. If you are fined I'll settle the bill, understand? I'm going to see that you get a square deal

and have a chance to show what's in you! And now will you shake hands with me, Sol Barrow?"

The big man heaved a great sigh and shook his head, even as he slowly extended his hand.

"I don't understand how ye kin do it, sir, arter the way I acted. Shore, it's fine, the way ye treated me an' my fambly. I'm agoin' to make good or bust the biler atryin'. Polly here kin tell you, sir, as I never break my word oncet it's given. I reckons as how I don't deserve this sorter treatment, but I got a lot to make up, a lot!"

Anson bent down to look at the child.

"Why, your coming home has done wonders for little Sue. Her eyes sparkle and that color in her face doesn't mean fever any more. I guess there's no doubt of her getting well quick enough now," he observed.

Meanwhile the woman bustled about preparing something warm for her man, who by his own confession had not partaken of food for two days, while he was dodging the searching wardens and finally making for the cabin in the woods where all he had in the world was sheltered.

"I kinder harf expected to find that Harbison here ahead o' me. Like as not he's agoin' to turn up sooner or later, but since ye was

so kind as to say ye'd see me through, sir, I reckons as how I ortent to be skeered o' Jim Harbison," Sol was saying, as he sniffed the odor of frying venison and moved uneasily.

Really the man was almost starved and could hardly keep from jumping up to attack the meat ere it was half cooked.

Again did the tea Anson had fetched along come into play, and in order to make sure that it was properly made the boy himself insisted upon attending to that part of the late meal, while Sol sat beside the cot, now and again burying his bearded face amid the clothes as he talked to the child.

Finally all was ready, and he sat down at the rough table, with the others hovering over him, all anxious to assist in some manner.

He ate like a hungry wolf, nor could Anson blame him; never in all his life had he gone twenty-four hours without a generous meal, and here this giant of a man, accustomed to stowing away enormous quantities of food, had been twice that long on a diet of water.

He was just about through and heaving a sigh of satisfaction when Abe suddenly uttered an exclamation of alarm and jumped from his bench, reaching out for his old rifle as though his first thought might be of defense.

Voices had sounded without, the rough

voices of men, and this was so remarkable a circumstance, coming at this hour of the night, in the lonely recesses of the wilderness, and while a storm yet howled, that there could be only one explanation of the mystery.

Even Anson guessed the solution, for those words which Sol had dropped gave him his one.

It must be Harbison, the head game warden, with one of his assistants!

Exasperated by the escape of his late prisoner, he had chased after him, and no doubt suspecting that eventually Barrow must head for his home in the woods, they had started there to lie in wait for him, if it happened that he had not already arrived home.

Anson was thrilled by the dramatic possibilities of the situation, but not for worlds would he have any of the others do the slightest thing that might look like resisting officers in the discharge of their duties.

A heavy knock sounded on the door.

"Let them come in; I'll keep my word, Sol Barrow!" said the young guest.

Abe slowly placed his gun in the corner, and stalking over to the door, removed the bar again.

Immediately two snow-covered figures pushed abruptly into the room.

"So, you got here ahead of us, did you, Barrow?" exclaimed the leader, in whom Anson recognized Harbison; "well, don't you dare attempt resistance, or it will be the worse for you. You are my prisoner, Sol!"

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Harbison. I broke out o' jail 'cause I heard my leetle gal Sue hyar was right sick, dyin', they tole me, an' nawthin' was agoin' to keep me from seein' her agin. But she's comin' along all right, thanks to this here doctor, what happened on ther track jest in time," and Sol waved his hand toward Anson.

"What, you here!" exclaimed the game warden, as he immediately recognized the young fellow.

"Yes, and Mr. Harbison, I want you to know that I've changed my mind about this man, Sol Barrow. The other fellow was more to blame, and I will never hold it against Barrow," observed Anson, thinking that since he must take up cudgels for the guide he might as well start right.

"Oh, that's the racket, is it? He's influenced you to side with him? But he's got to answer to the law for shooting game out of season. I decline to let him off on my account if you do. Barrow has given me a heap of trouble in the past, and when I've got him to

rights he's agoin' to pay the piper," replied the other, who was plainly tired and hungry after his arduous tramp.

"Well, I've agreed to pay his fine when it is settled. You look surprised, Mr. Harbison, but I believe the man means to turn over a new leaf, and that you'll never have trouble with him again. Some good woman got hold of him while he was locked up in town and induced him to sign the pledge!"

"What's that?" exclaimed the other, showing decided interest; "I can hardly believe it ain't a fairy story. Why, his wife here has been trying to get him to do that these five years and more, and he swore he never would."

Polly, with tears in her eyes, held out the precious paper so that the warden could read the contents, with Sol's mark against his name below.

"It's a fact, after all. Well, I know the man enough to believe he'll keep his word. And I'm glad, too; glad for these kids here, and the woman who stood back of him all the time he was acting the brute. Perhaps it can be all arranged so that he won't have to do time, if so be you want to pay a fine for his offense, young man? My, but I'm cold and hungry, ain't you, Pete?" this last to his assistant,

who was hovering over the table and sniffing at the remains of Sol's feast.

Polly took the hint.

"Set down, Mr. Harbison, and I'll git you some supper in a jiffy. Seems like this here might be a house where the guests they arrive at all hours of night. But they's plenty of venison handy, and this gentleman has given me some mighty fine tea if you'll have a cup!" she hastened to say.

Harbison winced, for he had evidently hoped to get a cup of strong coffee; but then half a loaf was certainly better than no bread.

"That's kind of you, Mrs. Barrow, and we're just going to accept. Walking on snowshoes is hard enough at any time, and with two inches of soft stuff on top of the crust it's just heart-breaking. This feels hunky-dory, eh, Pete?" and the warden held out his red hands toward the cheery blaze.

Anson bustled around preparing a new brew.

He was enjoying the whole affair more than he could have expressed in words, and would not have missed it for anything.

Since Mr. Harbison evidently felt something equivalent to contempt for tea, as a drink only suited to old maids, it should be his duty to correct that false impression; after

he had tasted the delicious Ceylon brew that Anson prided himself on making, he might change his views, and admit that for bringing good cheer it has no equal.

Sol looked liked a different man already, from what Anson remembered of him at the time of his arrest—the dissipated expression was gone from his face and his eyes beamed with new gladness, so that his wife stopped in her culinary labors frequently to glance over to where he sat talking with the wardens and holding the little hand of Sue, who had now gone to sleep again.

It was a picture that would linger long in the memory of the boy, and one which he could never recall without feeling a suspicious lump in his throat.

Anson was young and thus far had never met with much of life tragedies, so that he was more or less impressionable; and this reunion of the guide to his family under such dramatic conditions interested him greatly.

Of course, the two game wardens did full justice to the generous platter of meat that was presently set before them, together with some bread and the tea.

Anson was very particular to watch Mr. Harbison when he took his first swig of the beverage, and it tickled him to see a look of

surprise and even pleasure pass over the face of the head game warden.

"That sure tastes right, Mr. Garraway," he frankly admitted; "you see, I never did take any stock in tea, and believed it fit only for old maids and gossips, but it certainly does go right to the spot."

"I never go into camp without it. When I get soaked it answers all the purposes of whisky to warm me up and keep me from getting cold. And then as a bracer to tired nerves it can't be beaten. Once I thought just the same as you do, but a friend convinced me I was wrong. Glad you like it. Mrs. Barrow says it just suits her taste, too," which was drawing it rather strong, for the good woman could hardly be said to be a judge of the article of which she had been deprived so long.

It was now about midnight and evidently there would be little sleep in that backwoods cabin during the remainder of the night.

Little Anson cared, for he had enjoyed it all immensely and could make up for a lack of sleep another night.

Mr. Harbison and his assistant eventually climbed up into the loft to lie down for a few hours alongside Anson, but one of them kept the boy awake the balance of the night by snoring, so that when morning came Anson

for a little while felt, as he expressed it later on to Caleb, "like he had been pulled through a straw."

In the morning Harbison was in a more genial humor, and it was speedily arranged that in case Barrow had to stand trial in the spring and was fined for his previous offenses against the game laws, the young New Yorker would stand sponser for his assessment.

And since they were returning in a course that would take them to the boys' camp, Anson determined to accompany them.

The storm had petered out during the night, leaving just enough snow to make the going troublesome.

It was presently decided that Sol himself should accompany them as far as Anson's camp, with the idea of getting some other medicine for the child, but to tell the truth the boy secretly wanted to get him down there in order to load him up with some extra supplies, such as coffee and tea, which they would have no use for upon breaking camp presently.

Judge of the intense amazement of Caleb as he was hailed while making his way back home after a visit along the line of his traps in the swamp, and looking up saw first of all the red-bearded man who had been with Job

Bridges at the time the game wardens took them away.

But the presence of Mr. Harbison and also that of Anson, reassured him, so that he met them with a smile of welcome.

On the way to camp Anson regaled his chum with an account of his strange adventures, and when he had heard all, Caleb could only look at the other with moist eyes and silently grip his hand, for he certainly felt that he had the truest, biggest-hearted chum in the world.

And when Sol left them on the following morning, well laden with things the boys wanted the little family in the backwoods cabin to enjoy, the grip which the giant gave the hand of Anson he could feel for an hour afterward; but Sol was too overcome by the state of his emotions to give utterance to even a single word.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

Anson was done making those long trips now.

He believed he had scoured the country pretty thoroughly and seen all there was of it, and since the time of their departure would soon be rolling around, he preferred not being away from the home camp over night again.

It had been arranged that about the time set for their departure Abe and his father were to show up, to render what little assistance lay in their power, and take back all the unused foodstuff.

Caleb expressed a very earnest wish to meet the sturdy boy who had taken upon his shoulders the burden which his father had thrown aside, and was so earnestly trying to do a man's part at the time the great change arrived.

The traps had long since passed high-water mark.

Some days the catch now was very light, but still Caleb deemed it his duty to attend to his round faithfully.

The value of the pelts secured was not so great, but that he might have allowed more

time to elapse between his visits, but he feared lest some unfortunate animal on being caught might starve to death or otherwise suffer unnecessarily.

Anson made more visits to the haunt of the beavers, not disturbed now for a long while, and which, on sunny days, could be seen making preparations looking to a resumption of building operations at the dam.

Familiarity with the human kind had made them quite tame in comparison with their timidity at the time the boys first arrived, and Anson spent many an hour watching their movements, sometimes being in full view, though a little distance off.

Then fishing appealed to him more than ever and as the bait still held out in the queer little warm spring, he managed to bring in frequent messes of big pickerel that gave a most welcome change of diet.

Strange to say, it happened that to Caleb came the very last stirring adventure marking their camp in the North Woods.

For two days one of those early thaws had set in that gave abundant warning of the near approach of spring.

Caleb had already carried a third of his traps back to the cabin, so as to make the journey he took daily the shorter.

Really, he would not care particularly now whether he caught anything more or not, for he believed he had taken quite generous toll of the little woods folks, and that the bundle of pelts which he expected to carry out of the woods must be equal to any Uncle Abner had ever "toted" on his regular trips.

There were several traps situated in the middle of the big marsh that still captured their quota of rats daily, and it was to these he was paying most heed.

Which fact had to do considerably with the trouble that came upon him on this particular March day.

Something about one of these traps needed attention, and as he stooped down to fix the same Caleb, whose thoughts happened to be far away at the time, paid little attention to the surrounding marsh.

Suddenly he perked up his head to listen.

Surely he had heard the whistle of rapidly moving wings; and immediately shadows told that several birds were passing swiftly over.

"Ducks, by all that's good! Who would expect them to put in so early an appearance. I never knew such a thing to happen; and Sebattis said April was when he looked for them to arrive. Yum! yum! wouldn't it be great if I could bag a brace of ducks for din-

ner tonight? I can see the look on Anson's face. And there they drop into the marsh, too! I declare, I've half a notion to make a try."

Caleb was in the humor to be easily tempted, it seemed; for hurriedly marking the spot where he had seen the birds drop, he finished his work on the trap, after which he pulled out.

It was always tough going through that marsh; indeed, Caleb believed that it was the most remarkable bit of swampy land in the entire North Woods, on account of the unnatural warmth that seemed to exist deep down under the surface.

This had given them the warm spring in which the minnows kept moving throughout the whole winter, and there were places in the marsh that seemed never to freeze over, even while the border was tight in the grip of bitter winter.

Having made up his mind to try for duck Caleb started to circle around so as to approach the quarter with the breeze striking him in the face.

In this fashion he would not be likely to warn the quarry of his coming, which was quite a necessary thing, since the feathered

visitors had just arrived, and were likely to be easily alarmed.

In places he found the going very bad, and considered it lucky that he had on his long boots instead of moccasins, for the water and mud often reached half way to his knees.

But by and by he attained the shelter he was seeking, a little clump of dead grass, somewhere beyond which he fancied the ducks would be found.

As he peered out cautiously he discovered that sure enough the aquatic birds were on the surface of quite a large patch of water, fully half a dozen of them, and looking tantalizingly fat for the spring flight.

It was rather a long shot, and Caleb hated to risk it, even with the double-barreled Marlin, which he had happened to be carrying that morning for a change. Then he noticed that they were gradually heading toward him, and that in all probability they would be in much closer range when ten minutes had passed.

Ready to waste that much time on the chance of getting a supper, he crouched there, standing in the water and mud, and patiently waiting.

Just how long he had to hold out he never really knew; but he did realize that he was

getting very cramped with standing in the one position.

Finally making up his mind that the ducks were about as close as they would be apt to swim; and that he might as well be up and doing, he watched for a chance when several happened to be clustered close together, and then let fly.

As the birds fluttered and smote the water with their wings in trying to get a hurried start toward flight he gave them the other barrel.

Only two sped away, while a couple fell like rocks, and there was a confused flutter as others kicked around badly wounded.

"Hurrah!" shouted Caleb, visions of a delightful supper doubtless flashing before his mental vision.

And then he received something of a shock.

Upon attempting to move he found that he was unable to do so. His first thought lay along the line that his limbs might have "gone to sleep" under him, owing to the cramped position in which he had been standing; but as he glanced down in surprise he discovered that he was in the ooze, far above his knees!

He tried to draw one leg up, without result, save to push the other down still further into the slimy bed.

After a vain struggle of a full minute Caleb realized the horror of his position, and that he was fast in the merciless grip of the marsh mud that partook of the deadly nature of quicksand.

After that first horrible qualm that sent a shiver through his entire frame he pulled himself together.

Judging by the way in which he was sinking it would all be over in an hour, perhaps less; for he had heard something about the way in which these awful pits claim their victims.

The camp was too far away for Anson to hear him, no matter how loud he shouted; and indeed, his chum happened to have headed in an opposite direction that morning, when starting out on a little hunt for fresh meat.

He tried to drag his feet out of the tenacious mud, but early realized that the more he struggled in this manner the quicker he would push himself down.

If he ever got out of that difficulty it would have to be by some means other than by those already attempted; and that would mean outside influences.

There was that clump of grass behind which he had hidden while watching the approach of the ducks; but unfortunately it was beyond the reach of his grasp, and while he could

touch it with his extended gun that availed nothing.

Now the mud was within three inches of the top of his long rubber boots!

He shuddered while contemplating what the immediate future seemed to have in store for him.

Then he tried to recall to mind several stories which he had heard told about just such things, and how men caught in a treacherous quicksand had saved their lives by presence of mind.

One man had made a sort of mattress of leaves, twigs, and such things, upon which he had rolled, while kicking his feet free from the clinging mud; although Caleb feared that matters had gone much too far with him to admit of any such happy release.

There was another who had managed to drag himself out of the slough by seizing hold of the limb of a tree that fortunately hung within reach.

Eagerly he cast his eyes upward, knowing that a tree did chance to be growing some little distance away.

Sure enough, there was a branch above his head, but owing to the rapidity with which he had sunk down in the oozy bed he could just

touch the very lowest twigs with the tips of his fingers.

What was to be done?

The situation was desperate enough to demand quick thinking, and also prompt acting after a decision had been reached.

He could place his gun on the grass patch, where it would probably remain without slipping into the water.

Could he take off his coat and throw it up over the branch, thus drawing the same down within his eager clutch?

Caleb decided that the thing was possible; and at any rate that he was in the position of the beggar who should not be a chooser.

So he leaned as far forward as he could, and carefully placed Anson's precious Marlin double-barrel in safety; after which it was but the work of a few seconds to strip his coat off.

Making several efforts he finally managed to cast one end of the coat over the friendly branch, and seizing both sleeves drew down until he could get an arm over, and hook on.

After that he started to work with almost frenzied zeal, since he had so much at stake—his very life undoubtedly; and that was very precious to an ambitious young fellow of his calibre.

Striving furiously for five minutes he thereupon halted to recover his breath, and take stock as to whether his efforts had availed him anything.

To his delight he found reason to believe that the water was not up quite as far as before; and any little gain must be reckoned as encouraging, under the circumstances.

When he had again caught his breath Caleb started a new battle, just as determined as ever not to give over.

He worked under a great handicap, since he not only had to raise his own body, but fight against the clinging mud that sought to drag him down.

Many a time had the lad exercised upon a parallel bar, drawing himself up to his chin, and then lowering himself again; but that was child's play when compared with his present employment.

Had he been inclined to dally, the necessity forced upon him would have prevented such a thing; for to delay in the least was an invitation to disaster.

This time he succeeded in drawing himself up even more than at first; evidently as he persevered he was loosening the clinging mud more or less.

Besides, not attempting to rest his weight upon his lower extremities allowed of relief.

New hope buoyed him up, and gave him fresh courage to persevere, even when gasping for breath under his exertions.

Place a boy upon his own responsibility, and you will find out very quickly if there is anything in him worth having; and Caleb certainly proved in this instance that he could fight tenaciously when put to the test.

How long it took him to actually drag himself out of that oozy bed he never knew, for it often seemed to him that he must have been struggling there a greater number of minutes than he was actually away from camp.

When finally he succeeded in releasing his legs from the mud, and clung there to the branch, he was weak through long continued efforts.

Still, nerved by the splendid success that had come to him thus far, he was determined that he would keep it up until complete victory perched on his banner.

It was something of a jog to drag himself along that limb until he could gain a place where it offered a chance to clamber upward; and when he finally lay there, panting, yet able to look down at the smooth spot that had so recently held him in that giant grip, he

could hardly cling to the limb through sheer exhaustion.

Of course, after a little time he recovered much of his lost wind and strength.

His first thought was to regain possession of his gun; for he knew that Anson thought the world of that faithful little Marlin, that he had carried with him on several hunts along the Maryland shore, and North Carolina Sounds, where his uncle belonged to some game club.

This he accomplished in a manner that was at least unique.

Unwilling to trust his weight on that treacherous mud again, he managed to cut a long stick that had a nice hook at the end.

With this he commenced fishing until finally he secured just the hold he wanted when the gun was drawn up to his eager hands.

Next he thought about those ducks, for Caleb was also rather set in his ways, and did not like the idea of losing a fine supper.

Skirmishing around he discovered that the breeze had carried three of them over to the far shore, where they might be readily retrieved could he but gain that quarter.

This he at once set about doing, carefully feeling his way, lest he repeat his unpleasant adventure, perhaps with more tragic results.

And when he finally arrived at his destination, the first thing he saw was the fourth duck fluttering through some rank grass that stood up amid the ice with which the shores of the warm water lagoon were bordered.

Of course, Caleb accepted this as an invitation to take another shot, so as to finish the wounded bird; and he had the satisfaction of seeing it turn up its webbed feet in response to his hasty effort.

After considerable trouble he managed to retrieve all his game; and there was at least some satisfaction about that.

Even in the most bitter weather of the winter the lagoon in the marsh had never, so far as he could remember, been fully covered with ice; and of late what there was seemed to have melted most amazingly.

And yet the shores were still covered deeply with snow, and there was a good chance that at least one more storm would hit that neck of the woods before the season yielded to the warmer breath of spring.

Reaching camp he placed the ducks in a row where they would meet the eyes of Anson when he arrived; after which Caleb began to amuse himself in scraping the accumulated mud off his person.

Doubtless he would still find patches of the

black stuff on his garments from time to time; and the very sight of it would recall his adventure so vividly that he must shiver at the recollection.

About that time he heard the cheery whistle of his pard close by, and presently Anson came into view, carrying a couple of partridges that he had managed to bag when they alighted in the branches of a hemlock after being flushed.

Of course Anson looked his surprise when he saw what his chum was doing.

"Been wading after a rat?" he demanded, surprised that Caleb would think one pelt worth going to such trouble for.

"Supper!" said the other laconically, waving his hand toward the spot where the four ducks lay; and then laughing to hear the delighted exclamations that sprang from the lips of Anson.

"Had to retrieve 'em, I s'pose?" Anson next ventured; for perhaps something about the looks of Caleb aroused his suspicions.

"Nope, this all happened before I ever laid a hand on one of the things. To tell you the truth, old fellow, you came mighty near losing your mate," replied Caleb, something like moisture in his eye.

And then Anson just guessed it as if by inspiration.

"You've been caught in the mire of that plagued old marsh. I often wondered if we'd get through the season without something like that happening. Ugh! it must have been a terrible pickle. Tell me about it, Caleb," he urged, reaching out and squeezing the hand of the other affectionately.

Of course the one who had gone through the adventure tried to make as light of the matter as possible; but Anson knew it had been a close call, and he was more or less grave the balance of the day.

They certainly enjoyed the two ducks that were cooked for supper; and Caleb was of the opinion that he had fully earned the right to appreciate the tasty mess; but he avoided all further mention of the adventure.

Only the next day Anson made it a point to accompany him to the marsh, and asked that he point out the spot of his narrow escape.

He surveyed the tree that had offered a means of escape from the slimy mud, and shook his head as he took a long breath; nor did he care to say anything further about the adventure—the terrible possibilities that might have sprung from such a catastrophe overwhelmed the boy, and many times after

that he watched Caleb, as the latter did something around the cabin of nights, and speculated upon what an awful thing it would have been had he failed to drag himself out of the mud in the clever way he did.

They were now near the middle of March.

From certain signs the two young fur gatherers were inclined to believe that Spring was about to open unusually early this year.

The coming of the ducks was the first herald, and that early flock had been followed by others, so that Anson managed to pick up something tasty along this line for several days running, using his rifle to shoot at a long distance, and usually with remarkable success.

"I think that by the first of April we will be putting our traps in the canoes and floating down the swollen creek, homeward bound," remarked Anson, one night, as they sat there by the fire and listened to the whine of the wind without.

"Well, it can't come any too soon for me," returned Caleb, with a wistful look on his young face; and his chum understood that he was thinking of the dear mother, and others from whom he had been so long separated.

This winter in the woods had been the rarest of sports for Anson; but with his friend there were many regrets to accompany the pleasure.

"Got your pelts pretty well done up, I see?" continued Anson, indicating the various packages that were piled against the inner wall of the old shack, ready to be stowed away in the canoes when the time arrived for their departure.

"Oh! yes, I've had that job done for some little time, now. And it's a fine, dandy lot we've got, too," returned the other, proudly.

"Hold on there, don't take me into it at all. I've been the drone of this beehive, fattening on the good things, while you've done the hard work."

"Don't you ever believe it," cried Caleb, shaking his head furiously; "you've worked just as hard as I have, if in a different way. I came up here to earn some money to help see me along in my first year at college; while with you it was a case of regaining your health; and if I've succeeded fairly, you've made a grand success of your side. And there never was a time when you weren't willing to turn in and do your full share of the work, no matter what it was. I won't hear of such rank treachery to the firm of Garraway & Cushing. It was the luckiest day of my whole life when I met up with you."

"And what of me—where would I have been only for that grand suggestion of yours

about coming up here? I'm as rugged and healthy now as any fellow of my size; but if I'd gone back to the city, if I were lucky enough to be alive right now you know I'd be a walking skeleton. This winter has been the making of me. If any one has reason to be thankful over our meeting it's Anson Garraway; and don't you forget it, either!" cried Anson, getting up and stretching, just to show his chum how muscular he had grown.

"Anyhow, we've sure had the time of our lives!" declared Caleb.

"Never can forget it; and if I live I'm coming up here again and again. I love these grand old woods; and the memories they hold will haunt me always. Then again I'm interested in old John Sebattis, and that Barrow family. Wait till you meet up with young Abe; for I know you'll like him a heap. And I reckon they'll just be along here in ten days or so; for I said a little before the first of April."

"Well, let's go to bed, for both of us are tired," said Caleb, who had been unusually industrious that day, taking up a number of outlying traps and "toting" them home with him as unprofitable agents that required too much of his time without bringing results.

"Second the motion; only don't forget that

you promised to make some of those famous flapjacks of yours for breakfast," laughed the other.

"You'll get 'em all right; but I don't see that mine are a whit better than the ones you made last Sunday night. You're just rubbing the oil of flattery in so that I won't kick at the job. But I'm ready to sample a lot myself, so never mind."

They often indulged in jokes, and then again their conversation was apt to take a more serious turn; but as to quarreling, the first occasion for that had yet to show itself.

Anson's illness in the past had made him somewhat of a thoughtful lad; while in the case of his chum, the fact that he had no father often brought lines across his forehead, and induced sober reflection; still, much of the time they were as merry a couple as could be imagined, ready to take things as they came, and make the best of many a bad bargain.

Of course they had the flapjacks for breakfast on the following morning; and as usual Anson declared solemnly that they were actually the best Caleb had ever constructed.

"We'll mark it down in our log book of the outing that on this, the sixteenth day of March, the cook reached the zenith of his

career as a pancake-tosser; and took the heart of his weak imitator by storm," laughed Anson, as they got up from the meal, sighing, not like Alexander, for more worlds to conquer, but because of their inability to carry destruction further among the delicately browned flapjacks.

CHAPTER XX.

BREAKING CAMP.

It was on the seventeenth of March, illustrious day of St. Patrick, that Caleb had the surprise of the season thrust upon him. The killing of the lynx under such dramatic conditions, the affair of the bear, the wolves, the hungry wild cat, the visit and subsequent adventure with the panther, and finally that death of the grand old bull moose all sank into insignificance beside the shock Caleb received on this day.

He had been up along the creek, and into the swamp, but the catch was abnormally low, so that as he hurried homeward his spirits sank correspondingly, and he was not feeling very much as though he had been repaid for the long and wearisome tramp.

As he neared a spot where some days before he had seen the imprint of a fox, it occurred to him to step aside and take a look at a trap he had set near by.

Nothing had been taken in this particular trap all winter, and he used to laughingly refer to it as his "Jonah," when mentioning the outfit.

"I guess I might as well carry the old thing

to camp, now that my load is so light. No use hoping that the spell will ever be broken on this hoodoo. Perhaps there's something about the steel that scares everything away, and it needs a smoking in burning hemlock browse. I've got a good notion—" and that was as far as he went in his ruminations, for he caught a sound just ahead, where the "old Jonah" had been set, that sent an electric shock through him.

Surely there must be some sort of animal in the trap.

He heard a threshing sound, then a whine, followed by a scramble, as though a victim were endeavoring to escape.

Caleb hurried through the scrub, and the next moment stood as if transfixed.

There was something in the trap, something that indulged in violent gyrations at sight of a human being, and vainly endeavored to tear loose, or drag the trap from its anchorage — something that flashed through space like a streak of burnished silver, and yet which he immediatelv saw bore a strange resemblance to a wily Reynard.

No wonder Caleb was almost paralyzed with astonishment and delight.

The greatest streak of luck of all his life

had seemingly come to him on this gloomy St. Patrick's day—he had caught a silver fox!

Knowing that the fur of such a beauty must be worth all the way from three hundred up to a thousand dollars, he saw fortune before him, ready to be gathered in.

If he could only dispose of the little beauty without in any way injuring his glossy coat, how delighted he would be; and to accomplish this Caleb now set himself, always keeping his gun within reach of his hand, in case the fox managed to break away; for while he should hate very much to have to shoot, still, rather than lose the prize altogether he meant to do so.

While his excitement made him a bit clumsy, still in the end he managed to knock the fox over, and then it was easy enough to accomplish the rest very soon.

As he saw the beautiful little fellow lying before him Caleb took off his hat and gave a series of whoops that sounded strangely through the snow forest.

It was the climax of his successful season of trapping.

Men have gone through a long life in the woods, gathering furs, without ever taking a silver fox; and yet strange as it might seem,

here was a mere tyro scooping in a magnificent prize on his first winter out.

That is the way it frequently happens, however.

I have fished a lake noted for its bass twenty-five years, taking virtually thousands out by means of artificial fly, frogs, spinner, minnow, crawfish, helgramite, and every other means known to a disciple of Doctor Henshal, and never having a fish to my credit heavier than four and a half pounds; yet here comes a big lumbering city greenhorn trolling as he was told to do by his guide, and catching the record fish of the lake, weighing several pounds more than my best; and when it was caught in the weeds at the bottom, actually jumping overboard in three feet of water, scooping weeds and fish up in his arms and depositing the mess in the boat!

Think of it! Talk about luck!

Caleb was not so bad as that, because he had elements that go to make up a successful trapper in his composition, and even this one season's experience had given him a deeper insight into the business than many men obtain in years, simply because they never observe the habits of the animals they trap.

When Anson saw what his pard was carrying over his shoulder he made the woods

echo with his exultant whoops, while he danced about like a wild Iroquois Indian.

"Wow! didn't I say you'd do it if anybody could? Talk about luck, you are a whole team and a dog under the wagon. If you go to college and play on the baseball and football teams you'll win a reputation second to none. Say, did you ever see such a little beauty in all your life? No wonder they bring a thousand each. I bet this fellow is as fine as they ever made 'em, too. Shake hands, old chap. I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart," and there could be no question as to his sincerity, if one were to judge from the earnest manner in which he wrung Caleb's hand.

Not intent with that the impulsive Ans threw his arms about his chum, and squeezed him like a bear.

Their affection, the one for the other, was as sincere as that of David and Jonathan, or Damon and Pythias; and it would last for long years to come, even when both of them had taken their rightful places among the men who do things out in the big world.

There is nothing that will draw a couple of congenial souls closer together than months spent in company in the wilderness, where no outside influence comes to mar the communion

—then it is that they learn to know each other in a way that could never happen among the haunts of men, for the soul is bared when there is no heed of artificial veneering or polish, and the true man appears.

After this great day Caleb did not much care how soon the season came to an end, for he knew he had accomplished his ambition, with plenty to spare, and deep down in his heart he was yearning to see his dear mother again.

Still, they stuck it out, for the creek would not be navigable until all the ice had gone, and it was necessary that they use the canoes in transporting that glorious stock of furs to civilization.

Before leaving they went over and spent a couple of days with John Sehattis and his family, and had a most delightful time. Then came Sol Barrow and Abe to assist them in getting away, and take charge of all the supplies that remained. In the goodness of his heart Anson afterwards sent a new rifle to the reformed guide; besides gladly paying the fine assessed against him.

Uncle Abner probably never went down that creek with a cargo one-half as valuable as that which the two young trappers took out of the wilderness; and as he paddled Caleb

often allowed his thoughts to wander to the old man whom he remembered so well, always with pleasure and thanksgiving, since it had been owing more than a little to the good advice given in his diaries that this fine measure of success had befallen them, not to mention the fact that the bundle of traps in the chest had really inspired the idea of a winter in the woods.

The return trip was much easier than the plunge into the wilderness had been, for it was all downstream, and the swift current formed by the melting snows in the mountains did much to hurry their progress.

In two days they were home again, and Caleb had his arms about the neck of his mother, who had looked forward to his coming as only a loving parent can.

Tedbury boys were agog with excitement, and came in droves to see and handle the beautiful furs which the young trappers had brought out of the wilderness.

Even the doubting Thomas of the village gave up, and declared that Caleb Cushing was the luckiest fellow on earth, and he would take off his hat to him in the future.

What the collection brought when Anson sent it to the house in St. Louis with which he was in communication does not matter, but

it more than touched the top-notch figure the boys had dreamed of, and Caleb saw his college year provided for.

The fur coat for the little mother Anson saw to, and it was a beauty when done; and a proud woman wore it the following winter, when her boy was writing home from college of his work there.

Anson did not forget old John and his people, and several Marlins were shipped their way ere another hunting season began.

He and Anson never told just where they took those pelts, for it might be they would want to go again some other time, and there did not seem to be any necessity for giving the secret away. Perhaps the spirit of good old Uncle Abner would be grieved if his favorite nooks were overrun with a pack of strangers, bent on exterminating every living thing that made its home there. The thought of those quaint and interesting beaver also had something to do with this secrecy; for they had spared the little colony, hoping to have it increase in size, and naturally disliked the idea of others more ruthless potting the broadtails for the sake of the few dollars their furs would fetch.

Anson was as good as his word about the moose, and gladly paid the fine to which he

had made himself liable by killing such an animal out of season. At this date moose hunting is absolutely prohibited in the State of New York.

Sure enough, upon the floor of his room at college Caleb had a rug made of a gray skin; and often while he sat and studied, or reflected upon the past, his eyes would light up and a smile sweep over his face as he once more recalled that night in the valley cabin when the hungry panther fell down the broad-throated chimney, and aroused them to a sense of their danger.

Both lads have long since made names for themselves in their respective lines, and while Anson is a well-known surgeon, Caleb has been a traveler in many lands, which his pen and pencil have described in book and magazine.

THE END.

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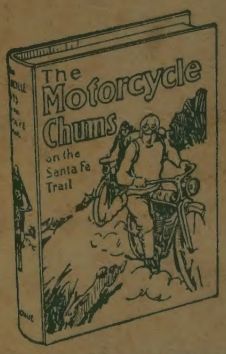

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